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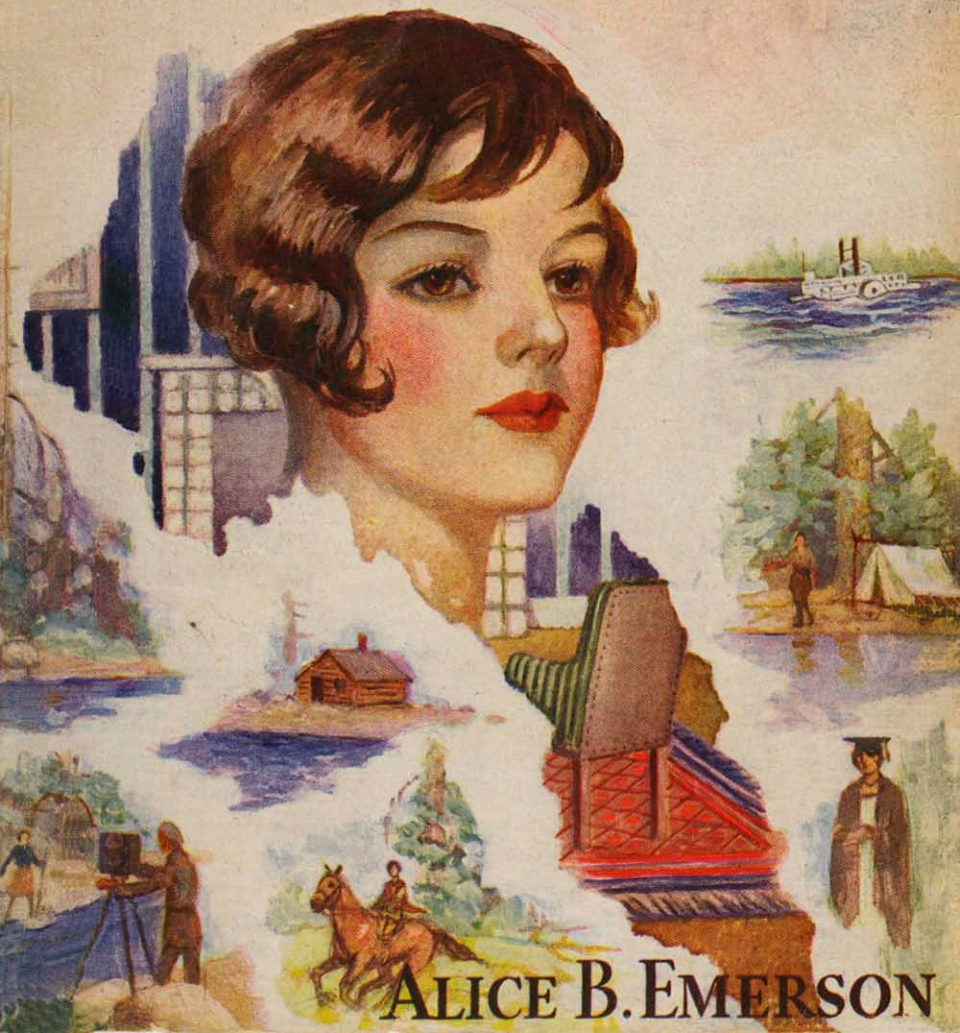

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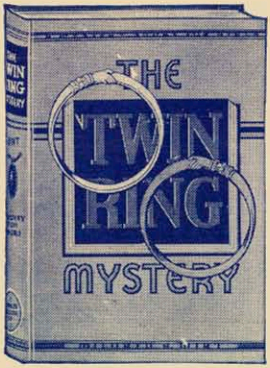

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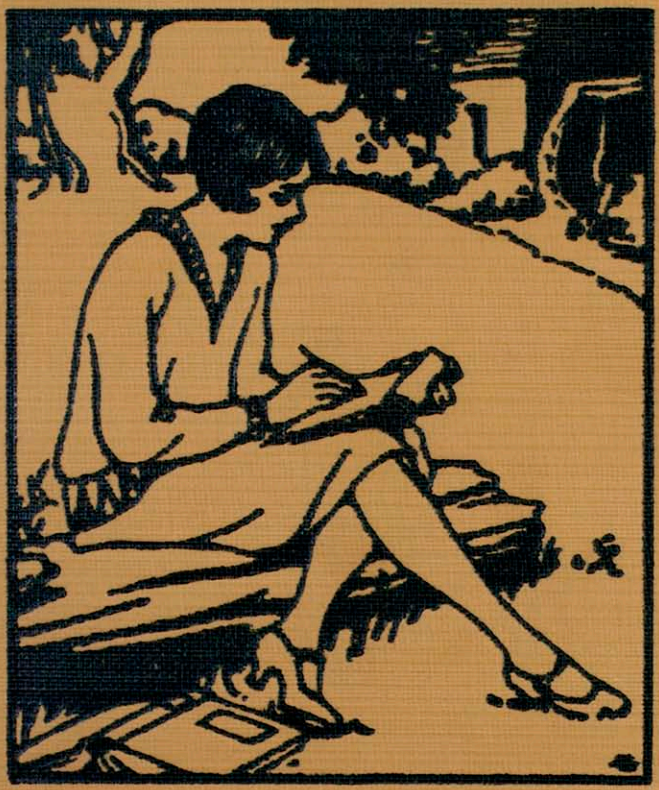

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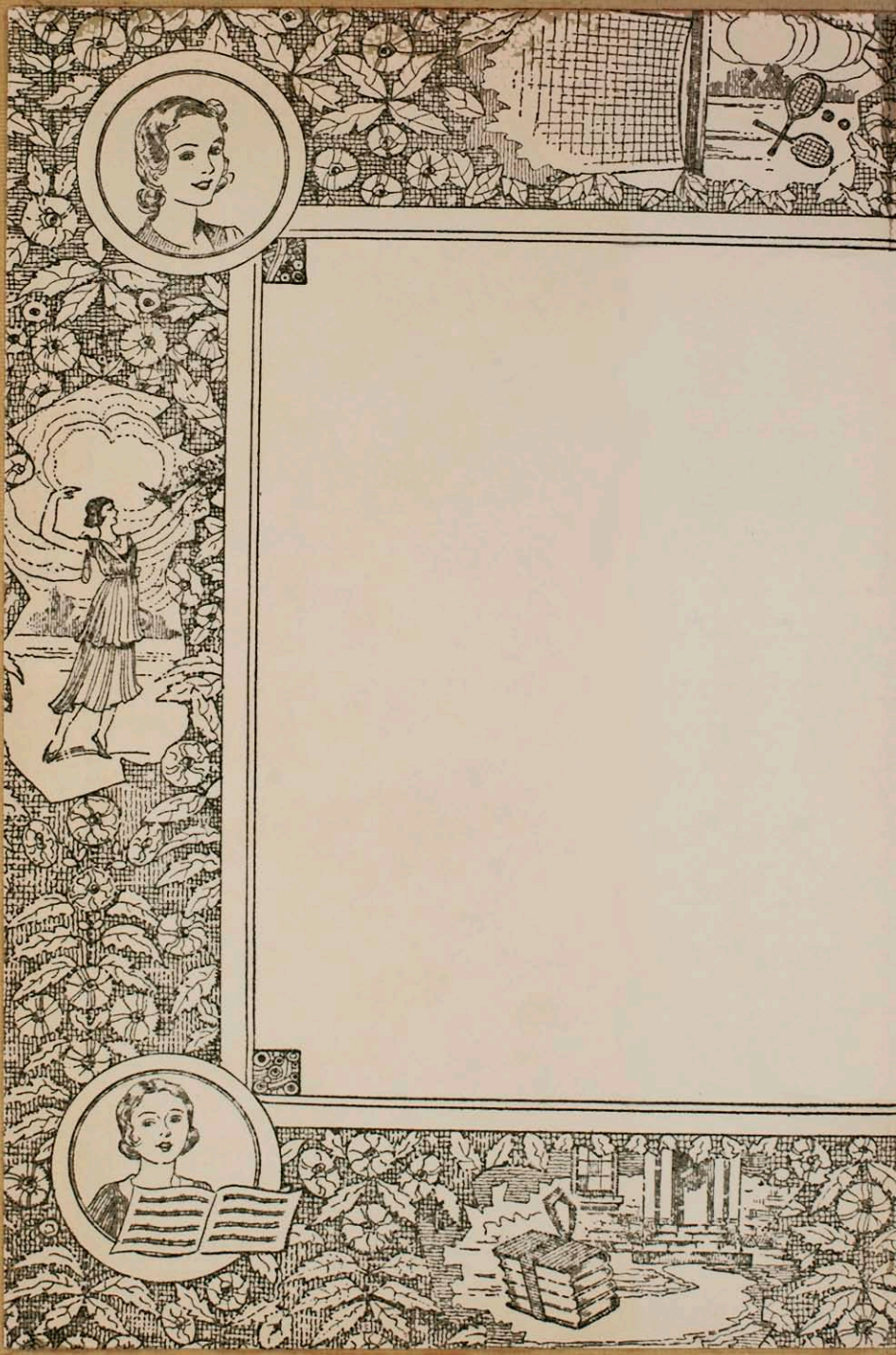

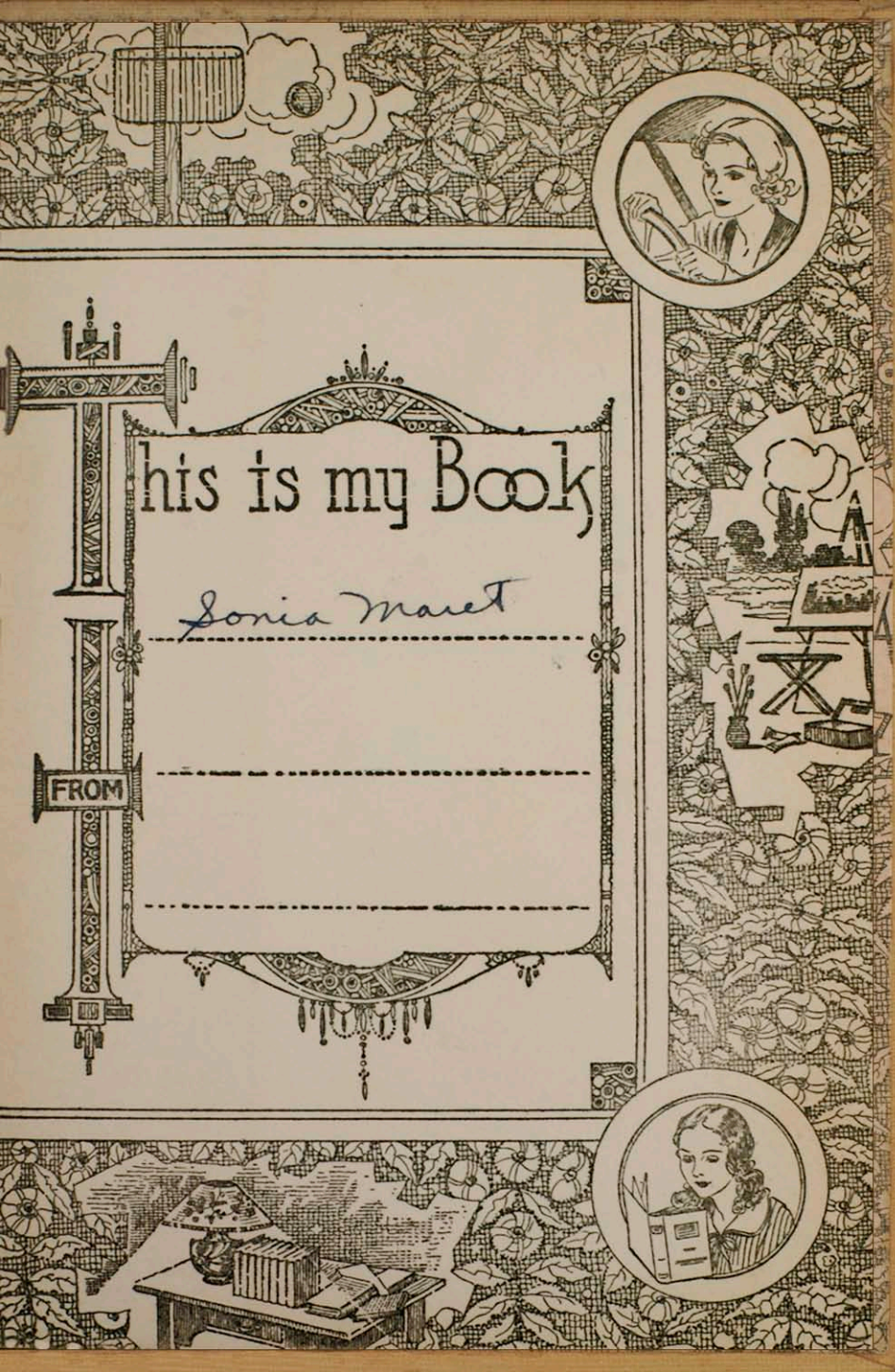
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RUTH FIELDING HOMEWARD BOUND

CHAPTER I

TEA AND A TOAST

"AND you once said, Heavy Stone, that you did not believe a poilu *could* love a fat girl!"

Helen said it in something like awe. While Ruth's tea-urn bubbled cozily three pair of very bright eyes were bent above a tiny, iridescent spark which adorned the "heart finger" of the plumper girl's left hand.

There is something about an engagement diamond that makes it sparkle and twinkle more than any other diamond. You do not believe that? Wait until you wear one on the third finger of your left hand yourself!

These three girls, who owned all the rings and other jewelry that was good for them, continued to adore this newest of Jennie Stone's possessions until the tea water boiled over. Ruth Fielding arose with an exclamation of vexation, and corrected the height of the alcohol blaze and dropped in the "pinch" of tea.

It was mid-afternoon the hour when a cup of tea comforts the fagged nerves and inspires the waning spirit of womankind almost the world over. These three girls crowded into Ruth Fielding's little cell, even gave up the worship of the ring, to sip the tea which the hostess soon poured into the cups.

"The cups are nicked; no wonder," sighed Ruth. "They have traveled many hundreds of miles with me, girls. Think! I got them at Briarwood——"

"Dear old Briarwood Hall," murmured Jennie Stone.

"You're in a dreadfully sentimental mood, Jennie," declared Helen Cameron with some scorn. "Is that the way a diamond ring affects all engaged girls?"

"Oh, how fat I was in those days, girls! And how I did eat!" groaned the girl who had been known at boarding school as "Heavy Stone," and seldom by any other name among her mates.

"And you still continue to eat!" ejaculated Helen, the slimest of the three, and a very black-eyed girl with blue-black hair and a perfect complexion. She removed the tin wafer box from Jennie's reach.

"Those are not real eats," complained the girl with the diamond ring. "A million would not add a thousandth part of an ounce to my pounds."

"Listen to her!" gasped Helen. "If Major Henri Marchand could hear her now!"

"He is a full colonel, I'd have you know," declared Jennie Stone. "And in charge of his section. In *our* army it is the Intelligence Department—Secret Service."

"That is what Tom calls the 'Camouflage Bureau.' *Colonel* Marchand has a nice, sitting-down job," scoffed Helen.

"Colonel Marchand," said Ruth Fielding, gravely, "has been through the enemy's lines, and with his brother, the Count Allaire, has obtained more information for the French Army, I am sure, than most of the brave men belonging to the Intelligence Department. Nobody can question his courage with justice, Jennie."

"*You* ought to know!" pouted the plumper girl. "You and my colonel have tramped all over the French front together."

"Oh, no! There were some places we did not go to," laughed Ruth.

"And just think," cried Helen, "of her leaving us here in this hospital, Heavy, while she went off with your Frenchman to look for Tom, my own brother! And she would not tell me a word about it till she was back with him, safe and sound. This Ruthie Fielding of ours——"

"Tut, tut!" said Ruth, shaking her chum a

little, and then kissing her. "Don't be jealous, Helen."

"It's not I that should be jealous. It is Heavy's friend with whom you went over to the Germans," declared Helen, tossing her head.

"And Jennie had not even met Major Marchand—*that was!* 'Colonel,' I should say," said Ruth. "Oh, girls! so much has happened to us all during these past few months."

"During the past few years," said the plump girl sepulchrally. "Talking about your cracked and chipped china," and she held up her empty cup to look through it. "*I* remember when you got this tea set, Ruthie. Remember the Fox, and all her chums at Briarwood, and how mean we treated you, Ruthie?"

"Oh, *don't!*" exclaimed Helen. "I treated my Ruthie mean in those days, too—sometimes."

"Goodness!" drawled their friend, who was in the uniform of the Red Cross worker and was a very practical looking, as well as pretty, girl. "Don't bring up such sad and sorrowful remembrances. This tea is positively going to your heads and making you maudlin. Come! I will give you a toast. You must drink your cup to it —and to the very dregs!"

"'Dregs' is right, Ruth," complained Jennie, peering into her cup. "You never will strain tea properly."

"Pooh! If you do," scoffed Helen, "you never have any leaves left with which to tell your fortune."

"'Fortune!' Superstitious child!" Then Jennie added in a whisper: "Do you know, Madame Picolet knows how to tell fortunes splendidly with tea-grounds. She positively told me I was going to marry a tall, dark, military man, of noble blood, and who had recently been advanced in the service."

"Goodness! And who could not have told you the same after having seen your Henri following you about the last time he had leave in Paris?" laughed Helen. Then she added: "The toast, Ruthie! Let us have it, now the cups are filled again."

Ruth stood up, smiling down upon them. She was not a large girl, but in her uniform and cap she seemed very womanly and not a little impressive.

"Here's to the sweetest words the exile ever hears," said she softly, her eyes suddenly soft and her color rising: "'Homeward bound!' Oh, girls, when shall we see America and all our friends and the familiar scenes again? Cheslow, Helen! And the dear, dear old Red Mill!"

She drank her own toast to the last drop. Then she shrugged her pretty shoulders and put

her serious air aside. Her eyes sparkled once more as she exclaimed:

"On my own part, I was only reminiscing upon the travels of this old tea set. Back and forth from the dear old Red Mill to Briarwood Hall, and all around the country on our vacations. To your Lighthouse Point place, Jennie. To your father's winter camp, Helen. And out West to Jane's uncle's ranch, and down South and all! And then across the ocean and all about France! No wonder the teacups are nicked and the saucers cracked."

"What busy times we've had, girls," agreed Helen.

"What busy times Ruth has had," grumbled Jennie. "You and I, Nell, come up here from Paris to visit her now and then. Otherwise we would never hear a Boche shell burst, unless there is an air raid over Paris, or the Germans work their super-gun and smash a church!"

"Ruth is so brave," sighed Helen.

"Cat's foot!" snapped Ruth. "I'm just as scared as you are every time I hear a gun. Oh!"

To prove her statement, that cry burst from her lips involuntarily. There was an explosion in the distance—whether of gun or bomb, it was impossible to say.

"Oh, Ruth!" cried Helen, clasping her hands. "I thought you wrote us that our boys had pushed

the Germans back so far that the guns could scarcely be heard from here?"

"Must be some mistake about that," muttered Jennie, with her mouth full of tea-wafers. "There goes another!"

Ruth Fielding had risen and went to the narrow window. After the second explosion a heavy siren began to blow a raucous alarm. Nearer aerial defense guns spoke.

"Oh, girls!" exclaimed Ruth, "it is an air raid. We have not had one before for weeks—and never before in broad day!"

"Oh, dear me! I wish we hadn't come," Helen said, trembling. "Let us find a *cave voûtée.* I saw signs along the main street of this village as we drove through."

"There is a bomb proof just back of the hospital," said Ruth, and then another heavy explosion drowned what else she might have said.

Her two visitors dropped their teacups and started for the door. But Ruth did not turn from the window. She was trying to see—to mark the direction of the Boche bombing machine that was deliberately seeking to hit the hospital of Clair.

"Come, Ruthie!" cried Helen, looking back.

"I don't know that I should," the other girl said slowly. "I am in charge of the supplies. I may be wanted at any moment. The nurses do

not run away from the wards and leave their poor *blessés* at such a time——"

Another thundering explosion fairly shook the walls of the hospital. Jennie and Helen shrieked aloud. They were not used to anything like this. Their months of war experience had been gained mostly in Paris, not so near the front trenches. A bombing raid was a tragedy to them. To Ruth Fielding it was an incident.

"Do come, Ruthie!" cried her chum. "I am frightened to death."

"I will go downstairs with you——"

The sentence was never finished. Out of the air, almost over their heads, fell a great, whining shell. The noise of it before it exploded was like a knife-thrust to the hearts of the frightened girls. Jennie and Helen clung to each other in the open doorway of Ruth's cell. Their braver companion had not left the window.

Then came the shuddering crash which rocked the hospital and all the taller buildings about it!

Clair had been bombed many times since the Boche hordes had poured down into France. But never like this, and previous bombardments had been for the most part at night. The aerial defense guns were popping away at the enemy; the airplanes kept up a clatter of machine-gun fire; the alarm siren added to the din.

But that exploding shell drowned every other

sound for the moment. The whole world seemed to rock. A crash of falling stones and shattered glass finally rose above the dying roar of the explosion.

And then the window at which Ruth Fielding stood sprang inward, glass and frame together, the latter in a grotesque twisted pattern of steel rods, the former in a million shivered pieces.

Smoke, or steam, or something, filled the cell for a minute and blinded Helen Cameron and Jennie Stone. This cloud cleared, and struggling up from the floor just outside the doorway, where the shock had flung them, the two terrified girls uttered a simultaneous cry.

Ruth Fielding lay on her face upon the floor of her cell. A great, jagged tear in her apron and dress revealed her bared shoulder, all blood-smeared. And half across her body lay a slab of gray stone that had been the sill of the window!

CHAPTER II

SUCH A DREAM!

THE lights in the day coach had just been lit and she was looking out into the gathering darkness as the train rolled slowly into Cheslow, the New England town to which her fare had been paid when her friends back in the town where she was born had decided that little Ruth Fielding should be sent to her single living relative, Uncle Jabez Potter.

He was her mother's uncle, really, and a "great uncle" was a relative that Ruth could not quite visualize at that time. It was not until she had come to the old Red Mill on the bank of the Lumano River that the child found out that a great uncle was a tall, craggy kind of man, who wore clothing from which the mill dust rose in little clouds when he moved hurriedly, and with the same dust seemingly ground into every wrinkle and line of his harsh countenance.

Jabez Potter had accepted the duty of the child's support without one softening thought of

love or kindness. She was a "charity child"; and she was made to feel this fact continually in a hundred ways.

Had it not been for Aunt Alvirah Boggs, who had likewise been taken in by the miller to keep house for him—the little, crippled old woman would otherwise have completed her years in the poorhouse. Had it not been for Aunt Alvirah Boggs, Ruth Fielding's first months at the Red Mill would have been a most somber experience, although the child was naturally of a cheerful and sanguine temperament.

The miserly miller considered Ruth Fielding a liability; she proved herself in time to be an asset. And as she grew older the warped nature and acid temper of the miller both changed toward his grand-niece. But to bring this about took several years—years filled with more adventure and wider experiences than most girls obtain.

Beginning with her acquaintance with Helen and Tom Cameron, the twins, who lived near the Red Mill, and were the children of a wealthy merchant, Ruth's life led upward in successive steps into education and fortune. As "Ruth Fielding of the Red Mill"—the title of the first book of this series—the little girl had never dreamed that she would arrive at any eminence. She was just a loving, sympathetic, cheerful soul, whose influence upon those about her was re-

markable only because she was so much in earnest and was of honest purpose in all things.

Uncle Jabez could appreciate her honesty, for that was one virtue he himself possessed. He always paid his bills, and paid them when they came due. He considered that because Ruth discovered a sum of money that he lost he owed her a reward. That reward took the form of payment for tuition and board for her first year at Briarwood Hall, where she went with Helen Cameron. At the same time Helen's brother went to Seven Oaks, a military school for boys.

In this way began the series of adventures which had checkered Ruth Fielding's career, and as related in the fourteen successive volumes of the series, the girl of the Red Mill is to be met at Briarwood Hall, at Snow Camp, at Lighthouse Point, at Silver Ranch, on Cliff Island, at Sunrise Farm, with the Gypsies, in Moving Pictures, down in Dixie, at College, in the Saddle, in the Red Cross, at the War Front. In this present volume she is introduced, with her chum Helen Cameron and with their friend, Jennie Stone, at the French evacuation Hospital at Clair, not many miles behind a sector of the Western Front held by the brave fighting men of the United States.

Ruth had been there in charge of the supply department of the hospital for some months, and

that after some considerable experience at other points in France. As everywhere else she had been, the girl of the Red Mill had made friends around her.

Back of the old-world village of Clair, the one modern touch in which was this hospital, lay upon a wooded height an old château belonging to the ancient family of the Marchands. With the Countess Marchand, a very simple and lovely lady, Ruth had maintained a friendship since soon after arriving at Clair to take up her Red Cross work.

When Tom Cameron, who was at work with his regiment on this very sector of the battle-front, got into trouble while on special duty beyond the German lines, it was by grace of Henri Marchand's influence, and in his company, that Ruth Fielding was able to get into the German lines and by posing as Tom's sister, "Fraulein Mina von Brenner," helped Tom to escape from the military governor of the district.

Aided by Count Allaire Marchand, the Countess' oldest son, and the then Major Henri Marchand, the girl of the Red Mill and Helen Cameron's twin brother had returned in safety through the German lines. The adventure had knitted a stronger cord of friendship between Ruth and Tom; although heretofore the young man had quite plainly showed that he considered

Ruth much the nicest girl of any of his sister's acquaintances.

Other than a strong sisterly feeling for Tom Cameron, Ruth had not really revealed. Perhaps that was as deep as her interest in the young man lay. And, in any case, she was not the girl to wear her heart on her sleeve.

The girls who had gone through Briarwood Hall together, and later had entered Ardmore College and were near to finishing their sophomore year when America got into the World War, were not the kind who put "the boys" before every other thought.

Marriage was something very far ahead in the future, if Ruth or Helen thought of it at all. And it was quite a surprise to them that Jennie Stone should have so suddenly become engaged. Indeed, the plump girl was one of "the old crowd" that the girl of the Red Mill had not supposed would become early engaged. "Heavy" Stone was not openly of a sentimental character.

But when, through Ruth, the plump girl had become acquainted with the Countess Marchand's younger son, Jennie Stone had been carried quite off her feet by the young Frenchman's precipitous courtship.

"Talk about the American boys being 'sudden'! Theirs is nothing to the whirlwind work of Henri Marchand!" exclaimed Helen.

Jennie and Helen Cameron had been going back and forth to Clair as affairs permitted during the past few months; therefore Jennie had become acquainted with the Countess and was now more often a visitor at the old château than at the hospital.

The country about Clair had quieted down during the past two months; and for a long time previous to this fateful day when our story opens, the war had touched the town but slightly save as the ambulances rolled in now and then with wounded from the field hospitals.

Gradually the roar of the cannon had retreated. The Yankees were forcing the fighting on this front and had pressed the Germans back, slowly but surely. The last and greatest German offensive had broken down, and now Marshal Foch had started his great drive which was to shatter utterly the foe's western front.

By some foul chance the German bombing plane had escaped the watchful French and American airplanes at the front, had crossed the fighting lines, and had reached Clair with its single building of mark—the hospital. The Hun raider deliberately dropped his cargo of explosives on and around this building of mercy.

In broad daylight the red crosses painted upon the roofs of the several departments of the institution were too plainly seen from the air for

the Hun to have made a mistake. It was a deliberate expression of German "frightfulness."

But the bomb, which in exploding had crushed inward the window of Ruth Fielding's little sleeping cell, was the final one dropped from the enemy plane. The machine droned away, pursued by the two or three airplanes that had spiraled up to attack it.

Enough damage had been done, however. As Helen Cameron and Jennie Stone scrambled up from the floor of the corridor outside Ruth's door their united screams brought the little *Madame la Directrice* of the hospital to their aid.

"She is killed!" gasped Jennie, gazing in horror at their fallen comrade and friend.

"Murdered!" shrieked Helen, and covered her face with her hands.

The Frenchwoman swept them both aside and entered the chamber. She was not more practical than the two American girls, but her experience of four years of war had made her used to such sights as this. She knelt beside the fallen girl, discovered that the wound upon her shoulder was not deep, and instantly heaved the heavy stone off the girl's back.

"La, la, la!" she murmured. "It is sad! That so-heavy stone! Ah, the bone must be broken! Poor child!"

"Isn't she dead?" gasped Helen.

"No, no! She is very bad wounded—perhaps. See—let us turn her over——"

She spoke in English. It was Jennie who came to her aid. Between them they turned Ruth Fielding over. Plainly she was not dead. She breathed lightly and she was unconscious.

"Oh, Ruthie! Ruthie!" begged Helen. "Speak to me!"

"No!" exclaimed the matron. "Do not attempt to rouse her, Mademoiselle. It is better that the shoulder should be set and properly bandaged before she comes to consciousness again. Push that button yonder for the orderly—twice! That is it. We will lay her on her cot—poor child!"

The woman was strong as well as tender. With Jennie's aid she lifted the wounded girl and placed her on her narrow bed. A man came running along the corridor. The matron instructed him in such rapid French that neither of Ruth's friends could understand all that she said. The orderly departed on the run.

"To the operating room!" commanded the matron, when the *brancardiers* appeared with the stretcher.

They lifted Ruth, who remained unconscious, from the bed to the stretcher. They descended with her to the ground floor, Jennie and Helen following in the wake.

On both of the main floors of the hospital nurses came to the doors of the wards to learn what had happened. Although the whole hospital had been shaken by the bombs, there had been no casualty within its precincts save this.

"Why should it have to be Ruth?" groaned Helen. "To think of our Ruthie being wounded —the only one!"

They shut the two American girls out of the operating room, of course. The *Médecin Chef* himself came hurriedly to see what was needed for the injured girl. *Mademoiselle Americaine,* as Ruth was called about the hospital by the grateful French people, was very popular and much beloved.

Her two girl friends waited in great anxiety outside the operating room. At last *Madame la Directrice* came out. She smiled at the anxious girls. That was the most glorious smile—so Jennie Stone said afterward—that was ever beheld

"A fracture of the shoulder bone; her sweet flesh cut and bruised, but not deeply, Mesdemoiselles. No scar will be left, the surgeon assures me. And when she recovers from the anesthetic—— Oh, la, la! she will have nothing to do but get well. It means a long furlough, however, for *Mademoiselle Americaine.*"

It was two hours later that Helen and Jennie sat, one on either side of Ruth's couch, in the

private room that had been given to the wounded Red Cross worker. Ruth's eyes opened heavily, she blinked at the light, and then her vision swept first Helen and then Jennie.

"Oh, such a dream!" she murmured. "I dreamed about coming to Cheslow and the Red Mill again, when I was a little girl. And I dreamed all about Briarwood, and our trips about the country, and our adventures in school and out. I dreamed even of coming here to France, and all that has happened. Such a dream!

"Mercy's sake, girls! What has happened to me? I'm all bandaged up like a *grand blessé!*"

CHAPTER III

IT'S ALL OVER!

THE shoulder had to be put in a cast; but the healing of the cuts and bruises on Ruth Fielding's back was a small matter. Only——

"It's all over for me, girls," she groaned, as her two friends commiserated with her. "The war might just as well end to-morrow, as far as I am concerned. I can help no longer."

For Major Soutre, the head surgeon, had said:

"After the plaster comes off it will be then eight weeks, Mademoiselle, before it will be safe for you to use your arm and shoulder in any way whatsoever."

"So my work is finished," she repeated, wagging a doleful head upon her pillow.

"Poor dear!" sighed Jennie. "Don't you want me to make you something nice to eat?"

"Mercy on us, Heavy!" expostulated Helen, "just because you work in a diet kitchen, don't think that the only thing people want when they are sick is something to eat."

"It's the principal thing," declared the plump girl stubbornly. "And Colonel Marchand says I make *heavenly* broth!"

Helen sniffed disdainfully.

Ruth laughed weakly; but she only said:

"Tom says the war will be over by Christmas. I don't know whether it is he or General Pershing that has planned out the finish of the Germans. However, if it is over by the holidays, I shall be unable to do anything more for the Red Cross. They will send me home. I have done my little, girls."

" 'Little!' " exclaimed Helen. "You have done much more than Jennie and I, I am sure. We have done little or nothing compared with your services, Ruthie."

"Hold on! Hold on!" exclaimed Jennie Stone gruffly, pulling a paper out of her handbag. "Wait just a minute, young lady. I will not take a back seat for anybody when it comes to statistics of work. Just listen here. These are some of the things *I* have done since I joined up with that diet kitchen outfit. I have tasted soup and broth thirty-seven thousand eight hundred and three times. I have tasted ten thousand, one hundred and eleven separate custards. I have tasted twenty thousand ragouts—many of them of rabbit, and I am always suspicious that the rabbit may have had a long tail—ugh! Baked cabbage

and cheese, nine thousand, seven hundred and six——"

"Jennie! Do stop! How *could* you eat so much?" demanded Helen in horror.

"Bless you! the poilus did the eating; I only did the seasoning and tasting. It's *that* keeps me so fat, I do believe. And then, I have served one million cups of cocoa."

"Why don't you say a billion? You might as well."

"Because I can't count up to a billion. I never could," declared the fleshy girl. "I never was top-hole at mathematics. You know that."

They tried to cheer Ruth in her affliction; but the girl of the Red Mill was really much depressed. She had always been physically, as well as mentally, active. And at first she must remain in bed and pose as a regular invalid.

She was thus posing when Tom Cameron got a four-days' leave and came back as far as Clair, as he always did when he was free. It was so much nearer than Paris; and Helen could always run up here and meet him, where Ruth had been at work. The chums spent Tom's vacations from the front together as much as possible.

When Mr. Cameron, who had been in Europe with a Government commission, had returned to the United States, he had laughingly left Helen and Tom in Ruth's care.

"But he never would have entrusted you children to my care," sighed the girl of the Red Mill, "if he had supposed I would be so foolish as to get a broken shoulder."

"Quite," said Tom, nodding a wise head. "One might have supposed that if an aerial shell hit your shoulder the shell would be damaged, not the shoulder."

"It was the stone window-sill, they say," murmured Ruth contritely.

"Sure. Dad never supposed you were such a weak little thing. Heigh-ho! We never know what's going to happen in this world. Oh, I say!" he suddenly added. "I know what's going to happen to me, girls."

"What is it, Captain Tom?" his sister asked, gazing at him proudly. "They are not going to make you a colonel right away, are they, like Jennie's beau?"

"Not yet," admitted her brother, laughing. "I'm the youngest captain in our division right now. Some of 'em call me 'the infant,' as it is. But what is going to happen to me, I'm going up in the air!"

"Oh!" exclaimed Jennie Stone. "I should say that was a rise in the world."

"You are never going into aviation, Tom?" screamed Helen.

"Not exactly. But an old Harvard chum of

mine, Ralph Stillinger, is going to take me up. You know Stillinger. Why, he's an ace!"

"And you are crazy!" exclaimed his sister, rather tartly. "Why do you want to risk your life so carelessly?"

Tom chuckled; and even Ruth laughed weakly. As though Tom had not risked his life a hundred times already on the battle front! If he were not exactly reckless, Tom Cameron possessed that brand of courage owned only by those who do not feel fear.

"I don't blame Tommy," said Jennie Stone. "I'd like to try 'aviating' myself; only I suppose nothing smaller than a Zeppelin could take me up."

"Will you really fly, Tom?" Ruth asked.

"Ralph has promised me a regular circus—looping the loop, and spiraling, and all the tricks of flying."

"But you won't fly into battle?" questioned Helen anxiously. "Of course he won't take you over the German lines?"

"Probably not. They don't much fancy carrying amateurs into a fight. You see, only two men can ride in even those big fighting planes with the liberty motors; and both of them should be trained pilots, so that if anything happens to the man driving the machine, the other can jump in and take his place."

"Ugh!" shuddered his sister. "Don't talk about it any more. I don't want to know when you go up, Tommy. I should be beside myself all the time you were in the air."

So they talked about Ruth's chances of going home instead. After all, as she could be of no more use in Red Cross work for so long a time, the girl of the Red Mill began to look forward with some confidence to the home going.

As she had told her girl friends that very day when the hospital had been bombed and she had been hurt, the sweetest words in the ears of the exile are "homeward bound!" And she expected to be bound for home—for Cheslow and the Red Mill—in a very few weeks.

Her case had been reported to Paris headquarters; and whether she wished it or not, a furlough had been ordered and she would be obliged to sail from Brest on or about a certain date. The sea voyage would help her to recuperate; and by that time her shoulder would be out of the plaster cast in which Dr. Soutre had fixed it. Whether she desired to be so treated or not, the Red Cross considered her an invalid—a *"grande blessée."*

So, as the days passed, Ruth Fielding gradually found that she suffered the idea of return to America with a better mind. The more she thought of going home, the more the desire grew in her soul to be there.

It was about this time that the letter came from Uncle Jabez Potter. A letter from Uncle Jabez seemed almost as infrequent as the blooming of a century plant.

It was delayed in the post as usual (sometimes it did seem as though the post-office department had almost stopped functioning!) and the writing was just as crabbed-looking as the old miller's speech usually was. Aunt Alvirah Boggs managed to communicate with "her pretty," as she always called Ruth, quite frequently; for although Aunt Alvirah suffered much in "her back and her bones"—as she expressed herself dolefully—her hands were not too crippled to hold a pen.

But Uncle Jabez Potter! Well, the letter itself will show what kind of correspondent the old miller was:

"My Dear Niece Ruth:

"It does not seem as though you was near enough to the Red Mill to ever get this letter; and mebbe you won't want to read it when you do get it. But I take my pen in hand just the same to tell you such news as there is and perticly of the fact that we have shut down. This war is terrible and that is a fact. I wish often that I could have shouldered a gun—old Betsy is all right now, me having cleaned the cement out of her muzzle what your Aunt Alvirah put in it—

and marched off to fight them Germans myself. It would have been money in my pocket if I had done that instead of trying to grind wheat and corn in this dratted old water-mill. Wheat is so high and flour is so low that I can't make no profit and so I have had to shut down the mill. First time since my great grandfather built it back in them prosperous times right after we licked the British that first time. This is an awful mean world we live in anyway. Folks are always making trouble. If it was not for them Germans you'd be home right now that your Aunt Alvirah needs you. You see, she has took to her bed, and Ben, the hired man, and me, don't know much what to do for her. Ain't no use trying to get a woman to come in to help, for all the women and girls have gone to work in the munitions factory down the river. Whole families have gone to work there and earn so much money that they ride back and forth to work in their own automobiles. It's a cussed shame.

"Your Aunt Alvirah talks about you nearly all the time. She's breaking up fast I shouldn't wonder and by the time this war is done I reckon she'll be laid away. Me not making any money now, we are likely to be pretty average poor in the future. When it is all outgo and no come-in the meal tub pretty soon gets empty. I reckon I would better sell the mules and I hope Ben will find him a job

somewhere else pretty soon. He won't be discharged. Says he promised you he would stick to the old Red Mill till you come back from the war. But he's a eating me out of house and home and that's a fact.

"If it is so you can get away from that war long enough, I wish you'd come home and take a look at your Aunt Alvirah. It seems to me if she was perked up some she might get a new hold on life. As it is, even Doc Davidson says there ain't much chance for her.

"Hoping this finds you the same, and wishing very much to see you back at the Red Mill, I remain,

"Yr. Obedient Servant,

"J. POTTER."

CHAPTER IV

TWO EXCITING THINGS

UNCLE JABEZ'S letter and Tom Cameron arrived at the hospital at Clair on the very same day. This was the second visit the captain had made to see Ruth since her injury. At this time Helen and Jennie had returned to Paris and Ruth was almost ready to follow them.

"It reads just like the old fellow," Tom said, smiling, after having perused the letter. "Of course, as usual he has made a mountain of trouble out of a molehill of vexation. But I am sorry for Aunt Alvirah."

"The dear old soul!" sighed Ruth. "I begin to feel that my being bombed by the Hun may not have been an unmixed evil. Perhaps Aunt Alvirah—and Uncle Jabez, too—very much need me at home. And without the excuse of my broken shoulder I don't see how I could have got away from here."

"I wish I were going with you."

"What! To leave your regiment and all?"

"No, I do not want to leave until this war is finished. But I hate to think of your crossing the ocean alone."

"Pooh! I shall not be alone. Lots of other people will be on the boat with me, Tommy."

"But nobody who would have your safety at heart as I should," he told her earnestly. "You cannot help yourself very well if—if anything should happen."

"What will happen, do you suppose?" she demanded.

"There are still submarines in the sea," he said, grimly enough. "In fact, they are more prevalent just now than they were when you came over."

"You bother about my chances of meeting a submarine when you are planning to go up into the air with that Mr. Stillinger! You will be more likely to meet the Hun in the air than I shall in the water."

"Pooh! I am just going on a joy ride in an airplane. While you——"

"It is not just a joy ride I shall take, I admit, Tom," Ruth said, more seriously. "I do hate to give up my work here and go home. Yet this letter," and she tapped the missive from Uncle Jabez, "makes me feel that perhaps I have duties near the Red Mill."

"Uh-huh!" he grunted understandingly.

"You know I have been running around and

having good times for a good many years. Aunt Alvirah is getting old. And perhaps Uncle Jabez should be considered, too."

"He's an awful old grouch, Ruth," said Tom Cameron, shaking his head.

"I know. But he really has been kind to me —in his way. And if he has had to close down the mill, and is making no money, he will surely feel pretty bad. Somebody must be there to cheer him up."

"He don't need to run that mill," said Tom shortly. "He has plenty of money invested in one way or another."

"But he doesn't think he is earning anything unless the mill runs and he sees the dollars increasing in his strong box. You know, he counts his ready cash every night before he goes to bed. It is almost all the enjoyment he has."

"He's a blessed old miser!" exclaimed her friend. "I don't see how you have stood him all these years, Ruthie."

"I really believe he loves me—in his way," returned the girl thoughtfully. "Poor Uncle Jabez! Well, I am beginning to feel that it was meant that I should go home to him and to Aunt Alvirah."

"Don't!" he exclaimed. "You'll make me wish to go home, too. And the way this war is now," said Tom, smiling grimly, "they really need all

us fellows. The British and the French have fought Fritz so long and at such odds that I almost believe they are half scared of him. But you can't make our Buddies feel scared of a German. They have seen too many of them running delicatessen stores and saloons.

"Why, they have already sent some of their great shock troops against us in this sector. All the 'shock' they have given us you could put in your eye and still see from here to the Goddess of Liberty in New York Harbor!"

"That's a bit of 'swank,' you know, Tom," said Ruth slyly.

"Wait! You'll see! Why, it's got to be a habit for the French and the British to retreat a little when the Germans pour in on top of them. They think they lose fewer troops and get more of the Huns that way. But that isn't the way we Yankees have been taught to fight. If we once get the Huns in the open we'll start them on the run for the Rhine, and they won't stop much short of there."

"Oh, my dear boy, I hope so!" Ruth said. "But what will you be doing meanwhile? Getting into more and more danger?"

"Not a bit!"

"But you mean right now to take an air trip," Ruth said hastily. "Oh, my dear! I don't want to urge you not to; but do take care, if you go up

with Ralph Stillinger. They say he is a most reckless flier."

"That is why he's never had a mishap. It's the airmen who are unafraid who seem to pull through all the tight places. It is when they lose their dash that something is sure to happen to them."

"We will hope," said Ruth, smiling with trembling lips, "that Mr. Stillinger will lose none of his courage while you are up in the air with him."

"Pshaw! I shall be all right," Tom declared. "The only thing is, I am sorry that he has made the date for me so that I can't go down to Paris with you, and later see you aboard the ship at Brest. But this has been arranged a long time; and I must be with my boys when they go back from the rest camp to the front again."

Ruth recovered herself quickly. She gave him her good hand and squeezed his in a hearty fashion.

"Don't mind, Tom," she said. "If this war is pretty near over, as you believe, you will not be long behind me in taking ship for home."

"Right you are, Ruthie Fielding," he agreed cheerfully.

But neither of them—and both were imaginative enough, in all good conscience!—dreamed how soon nor in what manner Tom Cameron would follow Ruth to sea when she was homeward bound. Nor did the girl consider how much of a

thrilling nature might happen to them both before they would see each other again.

Tom Cameron left the hospital at Clair that afternoon to make all haste to the aviation camp where he was to meet his friend and college-mate, Ralph Stillinger, the American ace. Ruth was helped by the hospital matron herself to prepare for an automobile trip to Lyse, from which town she could entrain for Paris.

It was at Lyse that Ruth had first been stationed in her Red Cross work; so she had friends there. And it was a very dear little friend of hers who came to drive the automobile for Ruth when she left Clair. Henriette Dupay, the daughter of a French farmer on the outskirts of the village, had begged the privilege of taking "Mademoiselle Americaine" to Lyse.

"Ma foi!" gasped plump little Henriette, or "Hetty" as almost everybody called her, "how pale you are, Mademoiselle Ruth. The bad, bad Boches, that they should have caused you this annoyance!"

"I am only glad that the Germans did no more harm around the hospital than to injure me," Ruth said. "It was providential, I think."

"But no, Mademoiselle!" cried the French girl, letting in her clutch carefully when the engine of the motor began to purr smoothly, "it cannot be called 'providential.' This is a serious loss for

us all. Oh, we feel it! Your going away from Clair is a sorrow for all."

And, indeed, it seemed true. As the car rolled slowly through the village, children ran beside the wheels, women waved their hands from the doorways of the little cottages, and wounded poilus saluted the passage of the Red Cross worker who was known and beloved by everybody.

The tears stung Ruth's eyelids. She remembered how, the night before, the patients in the convalescent wards—the boys and men she had written letters for before her injury, and whom she had tried to comfort in other ways during the hours she was off duty—had insisted upon coming to her cell, one by one, to bid her good-bye. They had kissed her hands, those brave, grateful fellows! Their gratitude had spilled over in tears, for the Frenchman is never ashamed of emotion.

As she had come down from her chamber every nurse and orderly in the hospital, as well as the surgical staff and even the porters and *brancardiers,* had gathered to bid her God-speed.

"The dear, dear people!" Ruth murmured, as the car reached the end of the village street. She turned to throw kisses with her one useful hand to the crowd gathered in the street.

"The dear, dear people!" she repeated, smiling through her happy tears at Hetty.

"Ah, they know you, Mademoiselle," said the

girl with a practical nod. "And they know they will seldom see your like again."

"Oh, la, la!" responded Ruth, using an expression of Henriette's, and laughed. Then suddenly: "You are not taking the shortest road, Henriette Dupay!"

"What! do you expect to get away from Clair without seeing Madame the Countess?" laughed the younger girl. "I would not so dare—no, no! I have promised to take you past the château. And at the corner of the road beyond my whole family will await you. Papa Dupay has declared a holiday on the farm till we go past."

Ruth was really very happy, despite the fact that she was leaving these friends. It made for happiness, the thought that everybody about Clair wished her well.

The car mounted the gentle slope of the highway that passed the château gates. It was a beautiful road with great trees over-arching it—trees that had sprung from the soil at least two hundred years before. With all the air raids there had been about Clair, the Hun had not worked his wrath upon this old forest, nor upon the château almost hidden behind the high wall.

The graceful, slim figure of the lady of the château, holding a big greyhound in leash, appeared at the small postern when the car came purring up the hill. Henriette brought the ma-

chine to a stop where the Countess Marchand could give Ruth her hand.

"Good-bye, dear child!" she said, smiling cheerfully at Ruth. "We shall miss you; but we know that wherever you go you will find some way of helping others. Mademoiselle Jeannie," (it was thus she spoke of her son, Henri's, sweetheart) "has told us much of you, Ruth Fielding. And we know you well, *n'est-ce pas,* Hetty? We shall never forget her, shall we?"

"Ma foi, no!" rejoined the practical French girl. "She leaves her mark upon our neighborhood, does she not, Madame la Countesse?"

On they rolled, past the end of the farm lane where stood the whole Dupay household, even to Aunt Abelard who had never quite forgiven the Americans for driving her back from her old home north of Clair when the Germans made their spring advance. But Aunt Abelard found she could forgive the military authorities now, because of Ruth Fielding.

They all waved aprons and caps until the motor-car was out of sight. It dipped into a swale, and the last picture of the people she had learned to love faded from Ruth Fielding's sight—but not to be forgotten!

CHAPTER V

THE SECRET

RUTH spent one night in Lyse, where she went to the pension patronized by a girl friend from Kansas City, Clare Biggars. She was obliged to have somebody assist her in dressing and disrobing, but she was in no pain. Merely she was warned to keep her shoulder in one position and she wore her arm in a black silk sling.

"It is quite the fashion to 'sling' an arm," said Clare, laughing. "They should pin the *Croix de Guerre* on you, anyway, Ruth Fielding. After what you have been through!"

"Deliver us from our friends!" groaned Ruth. "Why should you wish to embarrass me? How could I explain a war cross?"

"I don't know. One of the Kansas City boys was here on leave a few weeks ago and he wore a French war cross. I tried to find out why, but all he would tell me was that it was given him for a reward for killing his first ten thousand cooties!"

"That is all right," laughed Ruth. "They make fun of them, but the boys are proud of being cited and allowed to wear such a mark of distinction, just the same. Only, you know how it is with American boys; they hate to be made conspicuous."

"How about American girls?" returned Clare slyly.

That evening Ruth held a reception in the parlor of the pension. And among those who came to see her was a little, stiff-backed, white-haired and moustached old gentleman, with a row of orders across his chest. He was the prefect of police of the town, and he thought he had good reason for considering the *"Mademoiselle Americaine"* quite a wonderful young woman. It was by her aid that the police had captured three international crooks of notorious character.

Off again in the morning, this time by rail. In the best of times the ordinary train in France is not the most comfortable traveling equipage in the world. In war time Ruth found the journey most abominable. Troop trains going forward, many of them filled with khaki-uniformed fighters from the States, and supply trains as well, forced the ordinary passenger trains on to side tracks. But at length they rolled into the Gare du Nord, and there Helen and Jennie were waiting for the girl of the Red Mill.

"Oh! She looks completely done up!" gasped Helen, as greeting.

"Come over to the canteen and get some nice soup," begged Jennie. "I have just tasted it. It is fine."

"'Tasted it!'" repeated Helen scornfully. "Ruthie, she ate two plates of it. She is beginning to put on flesh again. What do you suppose Colonel Henri will say?"

"As though *he* would care!" smiled Jennie Stone. "If I weighed a ton he would continue to call me *petite poulet.*"

"'Chicken Little!' No less!" exclaimed Helen. "Honest, Ruthie, I don't know how I bear this fat and sentimental girl. I—I wish I was engaged myself so I could be just as silly as she is!"

"How about you, Ruthie?" asked Jennie, suspiciously. "Let me see your left hand. What! Has he not put anything on that third finger yet?"

"Have a care! A broken shoulderbone is enough," gasped Ruth. "I am looking for no other ornament at present, thank you."

"We are going to take you to Madame Picolet's," Helen declared the next minute, as they left the great train shed and found a taxicab. "You would not disappoint her, would you? She so wants you with her while you remain in Paris."

"Of course," said Ruth, who had a warm feel-

ing for the French teacher with whom she had been so friendly at Briarwood Hall. "And she has such a cosy and quiet little place."

But after Ruth had rested from her train journey, Madame Picolet's apartment did not prove to be so quiet a place. Besides Helen Cameron and Jennie Stone, there were a lot of other young women whom Ruth knew in Paris, working for the Red Cross or for other war institutions.

Of all their clique, Ruth had been the only girl who had worked right up on the battleline and had really seen much of the war. The visitors wanted to know all about it. And that Ruth had been injured by a Hun bomb made her all the more interesting to these young American women who, if they were not all of the calibre of the girl of the Red Mill, were certainly in earnest and interested in their own part of the work.

The surgeons had been wise, perhaps, in advising Ruth to take boat as soon as possible for the American side of the Atlantic. The Red Cross authorities gave her but a few days in Paris before she had to go on to Brest—that great port which the United States had built over for its war needs.

Helen and Jennie insisted on going with her to Brest. Indeed, Ruth found herself so weak that she was glad to have friends with her. She knew, however, that there would be those aboard the

Admiral Pekhard, the British transport ship to which she was assigned, who would give her any needed attention during the voyage.

Up to the hour of sailing, Ruth received messages and presents—especially flowers—from friends she was leaving behind in France. Down to the ship came a boy from a famous florist in Paris—having traveled all the way by mail train carrying a huge bunch of roses.

"It's from Tom," cried Helen excitedly, "I bet a penny!"

"What a spendthrift you are, Helen," drawled Jennie. But she watched Ruth narrowly as the latter opened the sealed letter accompanying the flowers.

"You lose," said Ruth cheerfully, the moment she saw the card. "But somebody at the front has remembered me just the same, even if Tom did not."

"Well!" exclaimed Tom's sister, "what do you know about *that?*"

"Who is the gallant, Ruthie?" demanded Jennie.

"Charlie Bragg. The dear boy! And a steamer letter, too!"

Helen Cameron was evidently amazed that Tom was not heard from at this time. Ruth had kept to herself the knowledge that Tom was going to the aviation camp and expected to make his

first trip into the air in the company of his friend, the American ace. This was a secret she thought Helen would better not share with her.

After she had opened Charlie Bragg's letter on the ship she was very glad indeed she had said nothing to Helen about this. For along with other news the young ambulance driver wrote the following:

"Hard luck for one of our best flying men. Ralph Stillinger. You've heard of him? The French call him an ace, for he has brought down more than five Hun machines.

"I hear that he took up a passenger the other day. An army captain, I understand, but I did not catch the name. There was a sudden raid from the German side, and Stillinger's machine was seen to fly off toward the sea in an endeavor to get around the flank of the Hun squadron.

"Forced so far away from the French and American planes, it was thought Stillinger must have got into serious trouble. At least, it is reported here that an American airplane was seen fighting one of those sea-going Zeppelins—the kind the Hun uses to bomb London and the English coast, you know.

"Hard luck for Stillinger and his passenger, sure enough. The American airplane was seen to fall, and, although a searching party discov-

ered the wrecked machine, neither its pilot nor the passenger was found."

Charlie Bragg had no idea when he wrote this that he was causing Ruth Fielding, homeward bound, heartache and anxiety. She dared tell Helen nothing about this, although she read the letter before the *Admiral Pekhard* drew away from the pier and Helen and Jennie went ashore.

Of course, Stillinger's passenger might not have been Tom Cameron. Yet Tom had been going to the aviation field expecting to fly with the American ace. And the fact that Tom had allowed her, Ruth, to sail without a word of remembrance almost convinced the girl of the Red Mill that something untoward had happened to him.

It was a secret which she felt she could share with nobody. She set sail upon the venturesome voyage to America with this added weight of sorrow on her heart.

CHAPTER VI

A NEW EXPERIENCE

TOM landed from a slowly crawling military train at a place some miles behind the actual battleline and far west of the sector in which his division had been fighting for a month. This division was in a great rest camp; but Tom did not want rest. He craved excitement—something new.

In a few hours an automobile which he shared with a free-lance newspaper man brought him to a town which had been already bombarded half a dozen times since Von Kluck's forced retreat after the first advance on Paris.

As Tom walked out to the aviation field, where Ralph Stillinger's letter had advised his friend he was to be found, all along the streets the American captain saw posters announcing *Cave Voûteé* with the number of persons to be accommodated in these places of refuge, such number ranging from fifteen to sixty.

The bomb-proof cellars were protected by sand-

bags and were conveniently located so that people might easily find shelter whenever the German Fokkers or *Tauben* appeared. Naturally, as the town was so near the aviation field, it was bound to be a mark for the Hun bombing planes.

Sentinels were posted at every street corner. There were three of the anti-aircraft .75's set up in the town. Just outside the place were the camps of three flying escadrilles, side by side. One of these was the American squadron to which Ralph Stillinger, Tom's friend, was attached.

Each camp of the airmen looked to Tom, when he drew near, like the "pitch" of a road show. With each camp were ten or twelve covered motor-trucks with their tentlike trailers, and three automobiles for the use of the officers and pilots.

Tom had not realized before what the personel of each *équipé* was like. There were a dozen artillery observers; seven pilots; two mechanicians to take care of each airplane, besides others for general repair work; and chauffeurs, orderlies, servants, wireless operators, photographers and other attachés—one hundred and twenty-five men in all.

Tom Cameron's appearance was hailed with delight by several men who had known him at college. Not all of his class had gone to the Plattsburg officer's training camp. Several were

here with Ralph Stillinger, the one ace in this squadron.

"You may see some real stuff if you can stay a day or two," they told the young captain of infantry.

"I suppose if there is a fight I'll see it from the ground," returned Tom. "Thanks! I've seen plenty of air-fights from the trenches. I want something better than that. Ralph said he'd take me up."

"Don't grouch too soon, young fellow," said Stillinger, laughing. "We're thirty miles or so from the present front. But in this new, swift machine of mine (it's one of the first from home, with a liberty motor) we can jump into any ruction Fritzie starts over the lines in something like fifteen minutes. I'll joyride you, Tommy, if nothing happens, to-morrow."

It was not altogether as easily arranged as that. Permission had to be obtained for Ralph to take his friend up. The commander of the squadron had no special orders for the next day. He agreed that Ralph might go up with his passenger early in the morning, unless something interfered.

The young men were rather late turning in, for "the crowd" got together to swap experiences; it seemed to Tom as though he had scarcely closed his eyes when an orderly shook him and told him

that Lieutenant Stillinger was waiting for him out by Number Four hangar—wherever that might be.

Tom crept out, yawning. He dressed, and as he passed the kitchen a bare-armed cook thrust a huge mug of coffee and a sandwich into his hands.

"If you're going up in the air, Captain, you'll be peckish," the man said. "Get around that, sir."

Tom did so, gratefully. Then he stumbled out into the dark field, for there were no lights allowed because of the possibility of lurking Huns in the sky. He ran into the orderly, the man who had awakened him, who was coming back to see where he was. The orderly led Tom to the spot where Stillinger and the mechanician were tuning up the machine.

"Didn't know but you'd backed out," chuckled the flying man.

"Your grandmother!" retorted Tom cheerfully. "I stopped for a bite and a mug of coffee."

"You haven't been eating enough to overload the machine, have you?" asked Stillinger. "I don't want to zoom the old girl. The motor shakes her bad enough, as it is."

"Come again!" exclaimed Tom. "What's the meaning of 'zoom'?"

"Overstrain. Putting too much on her. Oh, there is a new language to learn if you are going to be a flying man."

"I'm not sure I want to be a flying man," said Tom. "This is merely a try-out. Just tell me what to look out for and when to jump."

"Don't jump," warned Stillinger. "Nothing doing that way. Loss of speed—*perte de vitesse* the French call it—is the most common accident that can happen when one is up in the air in one of these planes. But even if that occurs, old man, take my advice and *stick*. You'll be altogether too high up for a safe jump, believe me!"

They got under way with scarcely any jar, and with tail properly elevated the airplane was aimed by Ralph Stillinger for the upper reaches of the air. They went up rather steeply; but the ace was not "zooming"; he knew his machine.

There is too much noise in an airship to favor conversation. Gestures between the pilot and the observation man, or the photographer, usually have to do duty for speech. Nor is there much happening to breed discussion. The pilot's mind must be strictly on the business of guiding his machine.

With a wave of his hand Stillinger called Tom's attention to the far-flung horizon. Trees at their feet were like weeds and the roads and waterways like streamers of crinkled tape. The earth was just a blur of colors—browns and grays, with misty blues in the distance. The human eye unaided could not distinguish many objects as far as

the prospect spread before their vision. But of a sudden Tom Cameron realized that that mass of blurred blue so far to the westward, and toward which they were darting, must be the sea.

The airplane mounted, and mounted higher. The recording barometer which Tom could easily read from where he sat, reached the two-thousand mark. His eyes were shining now through the mask which he wore. His first perturbation had passed and he began actually to enjoy himself.

This time of dawn was as safe as any hour for a flight. It is near mid-day when the heat of the sun causes those disturbances in the upper atmosphere strata that the French pilots call *remous*, meaning actually "whirlpools." Yet these phenomena can be met at almost any hour.

The machine had gathered speed now. She shook terrifically under the throbbing of the heavy motor—a motor which was later found to be too powerful for the two-seated airplanes.

At fifty miles an hour they rushed westward. Tom was cool now. He was enjoying the new experience. This would be something to tell the girls about. He would wire Ruth that he had made the trip in safety, and she would get the message before she went aboard the *Admiral Pekhard,* at Brest.

Why, Brest was right over there—somewhere!

Vaguely he could mark the curve of miles upon miles of the French coast. What a height this was!

And then suddenly the airplane struck a whirlpool and dropped about fifty feet with all the unexpectedness of a similar fall in an express elevator. She halted abruptly and with an awful shock that set her to shivering and rolling like a ship in a heavy sea.

Tom was all but jolted out of his seat; but the belt held him. He turned, open-mouthed, upon his friend the pilot. But before he could yell a question the airplane shot up again till it struck the solid air.

"My heavens!" shouted Tom at last. "What do you call *that?*"

"Real flying!" shouted Stillinger in return. "How do you like it?"

Tom had no ready reply. He was not sure that he liked it at all! But it certainly was a new experience.

CHAPTER VII

THE ZEPPELIN

STILLINGER was giving his full attention to managing his aircraft now. They were circling in a great curve toward the north. This route would bring them nearer to the lines of battle. The pilot turned to his passenger and tried to warn him of what he was about to do. But Tom had recovered his self-possession and was staring straight ahead with steady intensity.

So Stillinger shut off the motor and the airplane pitched downward. A fifty-mile drive is a swift pace anywhere—on the ground or in the air; but as the airplane fell the air fairly roared past their ears and the pace must have been nearer eighty miles an hour.

The machine was pointing down so straight that the full weight of the two young men was upon their feet. They were literally standing erect. Stillinger shot another glance at his passenger. Tom's lips were parted again and, although he could not hear it, the pilot knew Tom had emitted another shout of excitement.

The earth, so far below, seemed rushing up to meet them. To volplane from such a height and at such speed is almost the keenest test of courage that can be put upon a man who for the first time seeks to emulate the bird.

Nor is real danger lacking. If the pilot does not redress his plane at exactly the right moment he will surely dash it and himself into the earth.

While still some hundreds of feet from the earth, Stillinger leveled his airplane and started the motor once more. They skimmed the earth's surface for some distance and then began to spiral upward.

It was just then that a black speck appeared against the clouded sky over the not-far-distant battleline. They had not been near enough to see the trenches even from the upper strata of air to which the airplane had first risen. There was a haze hanging over the fighting battalions of friend and foe alike. This black speck was something that shot out of the cloud and upward, being small, but clearly defined at this distance.

The morning light was growing. The sun's red upper rim was just showing over the rugged line of the Vosges. Had they been nearer to the earth it would have been possible to hear the reveille from the various camps.

The whole sector had been quiet. Suddenly there were several puffs of smoke, and then, high

in the air, and notably near to that black speck against the cloud, other bursts of smoke betrayed aerial shells. Stillinger's lips mouthed the word, "Hun!" and Tom Cameron knew that he referred to the flying machine that hung poised over No Man's Land, between the lines.

The aerial gunners were trying to pot the enemy flying machine. But of a sudden a group of similar machines, flying like wild geese, appeared out of the fog-bank. There must have been a score of them.

Taking advantage of the morning fog, which was thicker to the north and east than it was behind the Allied lines, the Germans had sent their machines into the air in squadrons. A great raid was on!

Out of the fog-bank at a dozen points winged the Fokkers and the smaller fighting airplanes. It was a surprise attack, and had been excellently planned. The Allies were ready for no such move.

Yet the gunners became instantly active for miles and miles along the lines. In the back areas, too, a barrage of aerial shells was thrown up. While from the various aviation camps the French and British flying men began to mount, singly and in small groups, to meet the enemy attack.

The raid was not aimed against the American sectors to the east. They were a long way from

this point. Stillinger had blown far and was now nowhere near his own unit, if that should come into the fight.

Nor was he prepared to fight. He would not be allowed to—unless attacked. He had been permitted to take up a passenger, and after winging his way along the battle front to the sea, was expected to return to the aviation field from which he had risen.

Nevertheless, the machine gun in the nose of the airplane needed but to have the canvas cover stripped off to be ready for action. Tom Camron's flashing glance caught the pilot's attention.

"Are we going to get into it?" questioned Tom.

"Don't unhook that belt!" commanded Stillinger. "We can do nothing yet."

"It's a surprise," said Tom. "We must help."

"You sit still!" returned his friend. "I presume you can handle that make of gat?"

Tom nodded with confidence. Stillinger shot the airplane to an upper level and headed to the north of west, endeavoring to turn the flank of the farthest Hun squadron. Over the lines the yellow smoke now rolled and billowed. An intense air barrage was being sent up. They saw a German machine stagger, swoop downward, and burst into flames before it disappeared into the smoke cloud over No Man's Land.

Stillinger knew he was disobeying orders; but

his high courage and the plain determination of his passenger to help in the fight if need arose, caused him to take a chance. It was taking just such chances that had made him an ace.

Yet, as the airplane swung higher and higher, yet nearer and nearer to the group of enemy machines nearest the sea, and as the bursts of artillery fire grew louder, it was plain that this was going to be a "hot corner."

The rolling smoke and the fog hid a good deal of the battle. Suddenly there burst out of the murk a squadron of flying machines with the German cross painted on the under side of their wings. With them rose three French attacking airplanes, and the chatter of the machine guns became incessant.

There were eight of the enemy planes; eight to three was greater odds than Americans could observe without wishing to take a hand in the fight.

Stillinger shot his airplane up at a sharp angle, striving to get above the German machines. Once above them, by pitching the nose of his machine, the enemy would be brought under the muzzle of the machine gun which already Tom Cameron had stripped of its canvas covering.

They were between six and seven thousand feet in the air now. Without the mask, the passenger would never have been able to endure the rarified

atmosphere at this altitude. Unused as he was to aviation, however, he showed the ace that he was an asset, not a liability.

The free-lance airplane was observed by the Germans, however, and three of the eight machines sprang upward to over-reach the American. It was a race in speed and endurance for the upper reaches of the air.

The fog-bank hung thickest over the sea, and the racing American airplane was close to the coastline. But so high were they, and so shrouded was the coast in fog, that Tom, looking down, could see little or nothing of the shore.

Suddenly swerving his airplane, Stillinger darted into the clammy fog-cloud. It offered refuge from the Germans and gave him a chance to manoeuvre in a way to take the enemy unaware.

The moment they were wrapped about by the cloud the American pilot shot the airplane downward. He no longer strove to meet the three German machines on the high levels. If he could get under them, and slant the nose of his machine sharply upward, the machine gun would do quite as much damage to the underside of the German airplane as could be done from above. Indeed, the underside of the tail of a flying machine is quite as vulnerable a part as any.

But flying in the fog was an uncertain and trying experience. Where the German airplanes

were, Stillinger could only guess. He shut off his engine for a moment that they might listen for the sputtering reports of the Hun motors.

It was then, to his, as well as to Tom Cameron's, amazement, that they heard the stuttering reports of an engine—a much heavier engine than that of even a Fokker or Gotha—an engine that shook the air all about them. And the noise rose from beneath!

Stillinger could keep his engine shut off but a few seconds. As the popping of its exhaust began once more a bulky object was thrust up through the fog below. That is, it seemed thrust up to meet them, because the American plane was falling.

In half a minute, however, their machine was steadied. Tom uttered a great shout. He was looking down through the wire stays at the enormous bulk of an airship, the like of which he had never before seen close to.

Once he had examined the wreck of a Zeppelin after it had been brought down behind the French lines. These mammoth ships were being used by the Hun only to cross the North Sea and the Channel to bomb English cities. This present one must have strayed from its direct course, for it was headed seaward and in a southwest direction.

Taking advantage of the fog, it was putting to

sea, having flown directly over the British or Belgian lines. While the fighting planes attacked the Allied squadrons of the air, thus making a diversion, this big Zeppelin endeavored to get by and carry on out to sea, its objective point perhaps being a distant part of the Channel coast of England.

Where it was going, or the reason therefore, did not much interest Ralph Stillinger and Tom Cameron. The fact that the great airship was beneath their airplane was sufficiently startling to fill the excited minds of the two young Americans.

Were they observed by the Huns? Could they wreak some serious damage upon the Zeppelin before their own presence—and their own peril—was apprehended by the crew of the great airship?

CHAPTER VIII

AFLOAT

THE *Admiral Pekhard* nosed her way out of the port just as dusk fell. She dropped her pilot off the masked light at the end of the last great American dock—a dock big enough to hold the *Leviathan*—and thereafter followed the stern lights of a destroyer. Thus she got into the roadstead, and thence into the open sea.

The work of the Allied and American navies at this time was such that not all ships returning to America could be convoyed through the submarine zone. This ship on which Ruth Fielding had taken passage for home was accompanied by the destroyer only for a few miles off Brest Harbor.

The passengers, however, did not know this. They were kept off the open decks during the night, and before morning the *Admiral Pekhard* was entirely out of sight of land, and out of sight of every other vessel as well. Therefore neither Ruth nor any other of the passengers was additionally worried by the fact that the craft was quite unguarded.

The *Admiral Pekhard* mounted a gun fore and aft, and the crews of these guns were under strict naval discipline. They were on watch, turn and turn about, all through the day and night for the submarines which, of course, were somewhere in these waters.

The *Admiral Pekhard* was not a fast ship; but she was very comfortably furnished, well manned, and was said to be an even sailing vessel in stormy weather. She had been bearing wounded men back to England for months, but was now being sent to America to bring troops over to take the place of the wounded English fighters.

Ruth learned these few facts and some others at dinner that night. There were some wounded American and Canadian officers going home; but for the most part the passengers in the first cabin were Red Cross workers, returning commissioners both military and civil, a group of Congressmen who had been getting first-hand information of war conditions.

Then there were a few people whom the girl could not exactly place. For instance, there was the woman who sat next to her at the dinner table.

She was not an old woman, but her short hair, brushed straight back over her ears like an Americanized Chinaman's, was streaked with gray. She was sallow, pale-lipped, and with a pair of very bright black eyes—snapping eyes, indeed. She

wore her clothes as carelessly as she might have worn a suit of gunnysacking on a desert island. Her eyeglasses were prominent, astride a more prominent nose. She was not uninteresting looking.

"As aggressive as a gargoyle," Ruth thought. "And almost as homely! Yet she surely possesses brains."

On her other hand at table Ruth found a kindly faced Red Cross officer of more than middle age, who offered her aid at a moment when a friend was appreciated. Ruth did very well with the oysters and soup; and she made out with the fish course. But when meat and vegetables and a salad came on, the girl had to be helped in preparing the food on her plate.

The black-eyed woman watched the girl of the Red Mill curiously, seeing her left arm bandaged.

"Hurt yourself?" she asked shortly, in rather a gruff tone.

"No," said Ruth simply. "I was hurt. I did not do it myself."

"Ah-ha!" ejaculated the strange woman. "Are you literal, or merely smart?"

"I am only exact," Ruth told her.

"So! You did *not* hurt yourself? How, then?" and she glanced significantly at the girl's bandaged arm.

"Why, do you know," the girl of the Red Mill

said, flushing a little, "there is a country called Germany, in Central Europe, and the German Kaiser and his people are attacking France and other countries. And one of the cheerful little tricks those Germans play is to send over bombing machines to bomb our hospitals. I happened to be working in a hospital they bombed."

"Ah-ha!" said the woman coolly. "Then you are merely smart, after all."

"No!" said Ruth, suddenly losing her vexation, for this person she decided was not quite responsible. "No. For, if I were really smart, I should have been so far behind the lines that the Hun would never have found me."

The black-eyed woman seemed to feel Ruth's implied scorn after all.

"Oh!" she said, resetting her eyeglasses with both hands, "I have been in Paris all through the war."

"Oh, then you'd heard about it?" Ruth intimated. "Well!"

"I certainly know all about the war," said the woman shortly.

The girl of the Red Mill seldom felt antagonism toward people—even unpleasant people. But there was something about this woman that she found very annoying. She turned her bandaged shoulder to her, and gave her attention to the Red Cross officer.

Strangely enough, the queer-looking woman continued to put herself in Ruth's way. After dinner she sought her out in a corner of the saloon where Ruth was listening to the music. The windows of the saloon were shaded so that no light could get out; but it was quite cozy and cheerful therein.

"You are Miss Fielding, I see by the purser's list," said the curious person, staring at Ruth through her glasses.

"I have not the pleasure of knowing you," returned the girl of the Red Mill. "Can I do anything for you?"

"I am Irma Lentz. I have been studying in Paris. This war is a hateful thing. It has almost ruined my career. It has got so now that one cannot work in peace even in the Latin Quarter of the town. War, war, war! That is all one hears. I am going back to New York to see if I can find peace and quietness—where one may work without being bothered."

"You are——?"

"An artist. I have studied with some of the best painters in France. But I declare! even those teachers have closed their *ateliers* and gone to war. I must, perforce, close my own studio and go back to America. And America is crude."

"Seems to me I have heard that said before," sniffed Ruth. "Although my acquaintance among

artists has been small. Do you expect to find perfect peace and quietness in the United States?"

"I do not expect to find the disturbance that is rife in Paris," said Irma Lentz shortly. "This war is too unpopular in the United States for more than a certain class of the people to be greatly disturbed over what is going on so far away from home."

Ruth looked at her amazedly. The artist seemed quite to believe what she said. Aside from some few pro-Germans whom she had heard talk before Ruth Fielding had left the United States, she had heard nothing like this. It was what the Germans themselves had believed—and wished to believe.

"I wonder where you got that, Miss Lentz," Ruth allowed herself to say in amazement.

"Got what?"

"The idea that the war—at least now we are in it—is unpopular at home. You will discover your mistake. I understand that even in Washington Square they know we are fighting a war for democracy. You will find your friends of Greenwich Village—is that not the locality of New York you mean?—are very well aware that we are at war."

"Perfect nonsense!" snapped Irma Lentz, and she got up and flounced away.

"Now," thought the girl of the Red Mill, very

much puzzled, "I wonder just what and who she is? And has she been in Paris all through the war and has not yet awakened to the seriousness of the situation? Then there is something fundimentally wrong with Irma Lentz."

She might not have given the strange woman much of her attention during the voyage, however, for Ruth did not like unpleasant people and there were so many others who were interesting, to say the least, on board the ship, if a little incident had not occurred early the next morning which both surprised Ruth and made her deeply suspicious of Irma Lentz.

The girl could not sleep very well because of pain in her shoulder and arm. Perhaps she had tried to use the arm more than she should. However, being unable to sleep, she rose at dawn and rang for the night stewardess. She had already won this woman's interest, and she helped Ruth dress. The girl left her stateroom and went on deck, which was free to the passengers now.

As she passed through a narrow way behind the forward deck-house on the main deck, she heard a sudden explosion of voices—a sharp, high voice and one deeper and more guttural. But the point that held Ruth Fielding's attention so quickly was that the language used was German! There was no doubting that fact.

There certainly should be nobody using the

language on this British ship carrying Americans to the United States! That was Ruth's first thought.

She walked quietly to the corner of the house and peered around it. The morning was still misty and there were few persons on deck save the gangs of cleaners. Backed against a backstay, and facing the point where the girl of the Red Mill stood, was Irma Lentz, in mackintosh and veil.

The strange woman was talking angrily with a barefooted sailor in working clothes. He was bareheaded as well as barefooted, and his coarse shirt was open at the throat displaying a hairy chest. He passessed a mop of flaxen hair, and his countenance was too Teutonic of cast to be mistaken.

Besides, like the woman, he was speaking German in a most excited and angry fashion.

CHAPTER IX

QUEER FOLKS

In school Ruth Fielding and her classmates had taken German just as they had French. Jennie Stone often said she had forgotten the former language just as fast as she could and had felt much better after it was out of her system.

But the girl of the Red Mill seldom forgot anything she learned well. She had not used the German language as much as she had French. Nevertheless she remembered quite clearly what she had learned of it.

The seaman who was talking so excitedly to Irma Lentz, and whom Ruth overheard on the deck of the *Admiral Pekhard,* used Low German instead of the High German taught in the educational institutions. Ruth, however, understood quite a little of what was said.

"Stop talking to me!" Miss Lentz commanded, breaking in upon what the man was saying.

"I must tell you, Fraulein——"

"Go tell Boldig. Not me. How dare you

speak to a passenger? You know it is against all ship rules."

"Undt am *I* de goat yedt?" growled the man, in anger and in atrocious English, as the young woman swept past him. Then in his own tongue —and this time Ruth understood him clearly—he added: "Am I to work in that fireroom while you and Boldig live softly? What would become of me if anything should happen?"

Fortunately the woman did not come Ruth's way. She whisked out of sight just as the tramp of a smart footstep was heard along the deck. An officer came into sight.

"Here, my man, this is no part of the deck for you," he said sharply. "Stoker, aren't you? Get back to your quarters."

The flaxen-haired man stumbled away. He almost ran, it seemed, to get out of sight. The officer passed Ruth Fielding, bowing to her politely, but did not halt.

The girl of the Red Mill was greatly disturbed by what she had seen and overheard. Yet she was not sure that she should speak to anybody about the incident. She let the officer go on without a word. She found a chair on a part of the deck that had already been swabbed down, and she sat there to think and to watch the first sunbeams play upon the wire rigging of the ship and upon the dancing waves.

The ocean was no novelty to Ruth; but it is ever changeable. No two sunrises can ever be alike at sea. She watched with glowing cheeks and wide eyes the blossoming of the new day.

She was not a person to fly off at a tangent. No little thing disturbed her usual calm. Had Helen been there, Ruth realized that her black-eyed girl chum would have insisted upon running right away to somebody in authority and repeating what had been overheard.

There was just one circumstance which kept Ruth from putting the matter quite aside and considering it nothing remarkable that two people should be speaking German on this British ship. That was her conversation the evening before with Irma Lentz, the artist.

The woman had made a very unfavorable impression on Ruth Fielding. Any person who could speak so callously of the war and wartime conditions in Paris, Ruth did not consider trustworthy. Such a woman might easily be connected with people who favored Germany and her cause. Then —her name!

Ruth realized that one of the greatest difficulties that Americans, especially, have to meet in this war is the German name. Many, many people with such names are truly patriots—are American to the very marrow of their bones. On the other hand, there are those of German name who

are as dangerous and deadly as the moccasin. They strike without warning.

In this case, however, Irma Lentz, it seemed to Ruth, had given warning. She had frankly displayed the fact that her heart was not with her country in the war. After what Ruth had been through it annoyed her very much to meet anybody who was not whole-heartedly for the cause of America and the Allies.

She thought the matter over most seriously until first breakfast call. By that time there had appeared quite a number of the passengers. The more seriously wounded had all the second cabin, so those passengers who could get on deck were like one big family in the first cabin.

As the sea remained smooth, the party gathered at breakfast was almost as numerous as that at dinner the night before. Irma Lentz did not appear, however; but Ruth's Red Cross friend was there to give her such aid at table as she needed.

"What would you do," she asked him in the course of the meal, "if you heard two people speaking German together on this ship?"

He eyed her for a moment curiously, then replied: "You cannot keep these stewards from talking their own language. Some of them are German-Swiss, I presume."

"Not stewards," Ruth said softly.

"Do you mean passengers? Well, I speak German myself."

"And so do I. At least, I can speak it," laughed the girl of the Red Mill. "But I don't."

"No. Ordinarily I never speak it myself—now," admitted the man. "But just what do you mean, Miss Fielding?"

"I heard two people early this morning speaking German in secret on deck."

"Some of the deckhands?"

"One was a stoker. The other was one of our first cabin passengers."

The Red Cross man's amazement was plain. He stared at the girl in some perturbation, at the same time neglecting his breakfast.

"You tell me this for a fact, Miss Fielding?"

"Quite."

"Have you spoken to the captain—to any of the officers?"

"To nobody but you," said Ruth gravely. "I—I shrink from making anybody unnecessary trouble. Of course, there may be nothing wrong in what I overheard."

"But a passenger talking German with a stoker! What were they saying?"

"They appeared to be quarreling."

"Quarreling! Who was the passenger? Is he here at table?" the Red Cross man asked quickly.

"Do you think I ought to point him out?" Ruth asked slowly. "If it is really serious—and I asked for your opinion, you know—wouldn't it be better if I spoke to the captain or the first officer about it?"

"Perhaps you are right. If it was a merely harmless incident you observed it would not be right to discuss it promiscuously," said the man, smiling. "Don't tell me who he is, but I do advise your speaking to Mr. Dowd."

Mr. Dowd was the first officer, and he presided at the table on this morning as it was now the captain's watch below. Ruth had been careful to say nothing which would lead her friend to suspect that the passenger she mentioned was a woman.

"Yes," went on the Red Cross officer firmly, "you speak to Mr. Dowd."

But Ruth did not wish to do that in a way that might attract the attention of any suspicious person. The woman, Irma Lentz, had mentioned another person who seemed to be one of the queer folks. "Boldig." Who Boldig was the girl of the Red Mill had no idea. He might be passenger, officer, or one of the crew. She had glanced through the purser's list and knew that there was no passenger using that name on the *Admiral Pekhard.*

Even if Miss Lentz was out of sight, this other

person, or another, might be watching the movements of the passengers. Ruth did not, therefore, speak to the ship's first officer in the saloon. She waited until she could meet him quite casually on deck, and later in the forenoon watch.

Dowd was a man not too old to be influenced and flattered by the attentions of a bright young woman like Ruth Fielding. He was interested in her story, too, for the Red Cross officer had not been chary of spreading the tale of Ruth's courage and her work in the first cabin.

"May I hope the shoulder and arm are mending nicely, Miss Fielding?" Mr. Dowd said, smiling at her as she met him face to face near the starboard bridge ladder.

"Hope just as hard as you can, Mr. Dowd," she replied merrily. "Yes, I want all my friends to *will* that the shoulder will get well in quick time. I haven't the natural patience of the born invalid."

He laughed in return, and turned to get into step with her as she walked the deck.

"You lack the air of the invalid, that is true. Remember, I have had much to do with invalids in the time past. Although now we do not see many of the people who used to think there was something the matter with them, and whose physicians sent them on a sea voyage to get rid of them for a while."

"Yet you do have some queer folks aboard, even in war time, don't you?" she asked.

"Why, bless you!" said the Englishman, "everybody is more or less queer— 'save thee and me.' You know the story of the Quaker?"

"Surely," rejoined Ruth. "But now I suppose most of your queer passengers may be spies, or something like that."

She said it in so low a tone that nobody but the first officer could possibly hear. He gave her a quick glance.

"Meaning?" he asked.

"That I am afraid I am going to make you place me right in the catalogue of 'queer folks.'"

"Yes?"

His gravity and evident interest encouraged her to go on. Briefly she told him of what she had overheard that morning at daybreak. And this time she did not refuse to identify clearly the woman passenger who had talked so familiarly with the flaxen-haired stoker on the after-deck.

CHAPTER X

WHAT WILL HAPPEN?

RUTH FIELDING was not a busybody, but the peculiar attitude of the woman, Irma Lentz, toward America's cause in the World War and what she had overheard on deck that morning, as well as the advice the Red Cross officer had given her, urged the girl to take Mr. Dowd, first officer of the *Admiral Pekhard,* fully into her confidence.

He listened with keen interest to what the girl had to say. He was sure Ruth was not a person to be easily frightened or one to spread ill-advised and unfounded tales. Useless suspicions were not likely to be born in her mind. She was too sane and sensible.

The chance that there were actually spies aboard the *Admiral Pekhard* was by no means an idle one. In those days of desperate warfare between the democratic governments of the world and the autocratic Central Powers, no effort was neglected by the latter to thwart the war aims of the former.

To deliberately plan the destruction of this ship, although it was not, strictly speaking, a war ship, was quite in line with the frightfulness of Germany and her allies. Similar plotting, however, had usually to do with submarine activities and mines.

That German agents were aboard the *Admiral Pekhard* with the intention of bringing about the wrecking of the ship was, however, scarcely within the bounds of probability. Notably because by carrying through such a conspiracy the plotters must of necessity put their own lives in jeopardy.

No group of German plotters had thus far shown themselves to be so utterly unregardful of their own safety.

Ruth believed Irma Lentz to be quite bitter against the United States and its war aims; but she could not imagine the self-styled "artist" to be on the point of risking her personal safety on behalf of America's enemies.

These same beliefs influenced Mr. Dowd's mind; and he said frankly:

"It may be well for us to take up the matter with Captain Hastings. However, I cannot really believe that German spies would try to sink the ship, and so endanger their own safety."

"It does not seem reasonable," Ruth admitted. "Nor do I mean to say I believe anything like that is on foot. I do think, however, that the

woman and that seaman, or stoker, or whatever and whoever he is, should be watched. They may purpose to do some damage to the *Admiral Pekhard* after she docks at New York."

"True. And you say there is a third person—a man named Boldig? His name is not on the passenger list."

"That is so," admitted Ruth, who had read the purser's list.

"I'll scrutinize the crew list as well," said Mr. Dowd, thoughtfully. "Of course, he may not use that name. I remember nothing like it. Well, we shall see. Thank you, Miss Fielding. I know Captain Hastings will wish to thank you in person, as well."

Ruth did not expect to be immediately called to the captain's chartroom or office. Nor was her mind entirely filled with thoughts regarding German spies.

She had, indeed, one topic of thought that harrowed her mind continually. It was that which kept her awake on this first night at sea, as much as did the dull ache in her injured shoulder.

Had she expressed the desire for her companionship, Ruth knew that Helen Cameron would have broken all her engagements in France and sailed on the *Admiral Pekhard*. Her chum was torn, Ruth knew, between a desire to go home with the girl of the Red Mill and to stay near

Tom. As long as Tom Cameron was in active service Helen would be anxious.

And did Helen know now what Ruth feared was the truth—that Tom had got into serious trouble with the flying ace, Ralph Stillinger—she would be utterly despairing on her brother's account.

Ruth read over and over again her letter from the ambulance driver, Charlie Bragg, in which the latter had spoken of the tragic happening on the battle front—the accident to Ralph Stillinger and his passenger. Of course Ruth had no means of proving to herself that the passenger was Tom Cameron, but she knew Tom had been intending to take a flight with the American ace and that the active flying men were not in the habit of taking up passengers daily.

The American captain who had been lost with Ralph Stillinger was more than likely Tom Cameron. Ruth's anxiety might have thrown her into a fever had it not been for this new line of trouble connected with the artist, Irma Lentz. Or, was she an artist?

The news that had reached Ruth just as she boarded the *Admiral Pekhard* had been most disquieting. Had her passage not been already arranged for and her physical health not been what it was, the girl surely would have gone ashore again and postponed her voyage home.

This would have necessitated Tom's sister learning the news in Charlie Bragg's letter. But better that, Ruth thought now, than that her own mind should be so troubled about Tom Cameron's fate.

All manner of possibilities trooped through her brain regarding what had happened, or might have happened, to Tom. He might not, of course, have been the passenger-captain of whom Charlie Bragg wrote. But this faint doubt did not serve to cheer Ruth at all.

It was more than likely that Tom had shared Ralph Stillinger's fate—whatever that fate was. The American ace's airplane had been seen in battle with a Zeppelin. It had been seen to fall. Afterward the wreck of the airplane was found, but neither of the men—either dead or alive—was discovered.

That was the mystery—the unknown fate of the flying man and his passenger. The amazing fact of their disappearance caused Ruth Fielding anxiety and depression of mind.

She even thought of trying to get news by wireless of the tragic happening to the flying man and his companion. But when she made inquiry she learned that because of war measures no private message could be sent or received by radio. Such wireless news as the naval authorities considered well to distribute to the passengers of the *Ad-*

miral Pekhard was bulletined by the radio room door.

Later Ruth was sent for to attend the captain in his office. She found the commander of the ship to be a tight, little, side-whiskered Englishman with a large opinion of his own importance and an insular suspicion of Americans in general. This type of British subject was growing happily less —especially since the United States entered the war; but Captain Hastings was not so favorably impressed by Ruth Fielding and her story as his first officer had been.

"You know, Miss Fielding, I don't wish to have any hard feelings among my passengers," he said. He verged toward a slight cockney accent now and then, and he squinted rather unpleasantly.

"This is a serious accusation you bring against Miss Irma Lentz. I have seen her passport and other papers. She is quite beyond suspicion, don't you know. I should not wish to insult her by accusing her of being an enemy agent. Really, Miss Fielding," he concluded bluntly, "she seems to be much better known by people aboard than yourself."

Ruth stiffened at the implied doubt cast upon her character. Here was a man who lacked all the tact a ship's captain is supposed to possess. He was nothing at all like Mr. Dowd.

"I have not asked to have my status aboard

your ship tested, nor my reputation established, Captain Hastings," she said quietly but firmly. "Had I not thought it my duty to say what I did to Mr. Dowd, I assure you I should not have put myself out to do so. But as you have—either justly or unjustly—judged the character of my information, you cannot by any possibility wish to know my opinion in this. There was scarcely need of calling me here, was there?"

She arose and turned toward the door of the chartroom, and her manner as well as her words showed him plainly that she was offended.

"Hoighty-toighty!" exclaimed the little man, growing very red in the face. "You take much for granted, Miss Fielding."

"I make no mistake, I believe, in understanding that you do not consider my information to Mr. Dowd of importance."

"Oh, Dowd is a young fool!" snapped the commander of the *Admiral Pekhard*. "He is trying to stir up a mare's nest."

"Your opinion of me must be even worse than that you have expressed of your first officer," tartly rejoined the girl. "If you will excuse me, Captain Hastings, I will withdraw. Really our opinions I feel sure would never coincide."

"Wait!" exclaimed the captain. "I am willing to put one thing to the test."

"You need do nothing to placate me, Captain

Hastings," declared Ruth. "I am quite, quite satisfied to drop the whole affair, I assure you."

"It has gone too far, as it is, Miss Fielding," declared Captain Hastings. "Dowd will not be satisfied if you do not have the opportunity of identifying the stoker you say you saw talking with Miss Lentz. And that, in itself, is no crime."

"Then why trouble yourself—and me—about the matter any further?" asked Ruth, with a shrug, and her hand still on the knob of the door.

"Confound it, you know!" burst forth the captain, "it has to go on my report—on the log, you know. That fool, Dowd, insists. I want you to see the stokers together, Miss Fielding, as the watches are being changed at eight bells. If you can pick out the man you say you saw on the after deck, I will examine him. Though it's all bally foolishness, you know," added the captain in a tone that did not fail to reach Ruth Fielding's ear and increased her feeling of disgust for the pompous little man, as well as her vexation with the whole situation.

She wished very much just then that she had not spoken at all to the *Admiral Pekhard's* first officer.

CHAPTER XI

DEVELOPMENTS

At ten minutes or so before noon a smart little sub-officer came to Ruth's stateroom and asked her to accompany him to the engineroom, amidships. As a last thought the girl took a chiffon veil with her, and before she stepped into the quarters where all the shiny machinery was, she threw the veil over her head and face. It had suddenly been impressed on her mind that she did not care to have the man she had taken for a German identify her, even if she did him.

She found both Mr. Dowd and the commander of the steamship on this deck. The first officer came to Ruth in rather an apologetic way.

"I did not know," he said gently, "that I was getting you into any trouble when I repeated what you told me to Captain Hastings. This is my very first voyage with him—and, believe me, it shall be my last!"

His eyes sparkled, and it was evident that he had found the pompous little commander much

to his distaste. The captain did not seek to speak to Ruth at all. He stood at one side as the stokers filed in from forward, ready to relieve those working in the fireroom below.

"Do you see him in that line, Miss Fielding?" whispered the first officer.

She scrutinized the men carefully. Early that morning she had had plenty of opportunity to get the appearance of the German who spoke to Irma Lentz photographed on her mind, and she knew at first glance that he was not in this group.

However, she took her time and scrutinized them all carefully. There was not a single flaxen-haired man among them, and nobody that in the least seemed like the man she had in mind.

"No," she said to Mr. Dowd. "He is not here."

"Wait till the others come up. There! The boatswain pipes."

The shrill whistle started the waiting stokers down the ladder into the stoke-hole. In a minute or two a red, sweating, ashes-streaked face appeared as the first of the watch relieved came up into the engine room. This was not the man Ruth looked for.

One after another the men appeared—Irish, Swede, Dane, negro, and nondescript; but never a German. And not one of the fellows looked at all like the man Ruth expected to see. Dowd

gazed upon her questioningly. Ruth slowly shook her head.

"Any more firemen or coal passers down there, boy?" Dowd asked the negro stoker.

"No, suh! Ain't none of de watch lef' behind," declared the man, as he followed his mates forward.

"Well, are you satisfied?" snapped the thin voice of Captain Hastings.

"Not altogether," Ruth bravely retorted. "It might be that the man was not a stoker. I only thought so because the officer who interrupted the conversation I overheard seemed to consider him a stoker. He sent the man off that part of the deck."

"What officer?" demanded the captain, doubtfully. "An officer of the ship? One of my officers?"

"Yes, sir."

"Ha, you want to examine my officers, then, I presume?"

"Not at all," Ruth said coldly. "I am not taking any pleasure in this investigation, I assure you."

"It will be easy enough to find the officer whom Miss Fielding refers to," said Mr. Dowd, interposing before Captain Hastings could speak again. "I know who was on duty at that hour this morning. It will be easily discovered who

the officer is. And if he remembers the man on deck——"

"Ah—yes—if he *does*," said Captain Hastings in his very nastiest way.

Ruth's cheeks flamed again. Mr. Dowd placed a gentle hand upon her sleeve.

"Never mind that oaf," he whispered. "He doesn't know how to behave himself. How he ever got command of a ship like this—well, it shows to what straits we have come in this wartime. Do you mind meeting me later abaft the stacks on deck? I will bring the men, one of whom I think may be the chap we are looking for. Of course he will remember if he drove a seaman or a stoker off the after deck this morning."

Ruth did not see how she could refuse the respectful and sensible first officer, but she certainly was angry with Captain Hastings and she swept by him to the stairway without giving him another glance.

"It's all bosh!" she heard him say to Mr. Dowd, as she started for the open deck.

Her dignity was hurt, as well as her indignation aroused. She was not in the habit of having her word doubted; and it seemed that Captain Hastings certainly did consider that there was reason for thinking her untruthful. She was more than sorry that she had taken the Red Cross man's

advice and brought this matter to the attention of Mr. Dowd in the first place.

Yet the first officer was her friend. She could see that. He did not intend to let the matter rest at a point where Captain Hastings would have any reason for intimating that Ruth had not been exact in her statements of fact.

Of course, the girl of the Red Mill had not taken so close a look at the ship's officer who had driven the stoker off the deck, as she had at the stoker himself. But she was quite confident she would know him. She had not seen him since, that was sure.

After half an hour or so Mr. Dowd came to the place where she sat sheltered from the stiff breeze that was blowing, with a uniformed man in toll. It was not the officer whom she had seen early in the morning.

"I quite remember seeing Miss Fielding on deck at dawn," said the young fellow politely. "But I do not remember seeing any of the crew except those at work scrubbing down."

"This was on the starboard run, Miss Fielding?" suggested Mr. Dowd.

"Yes, sir. It was right yonder," and she pointed to the spot in question.

"It must be Dykman, then, you wish to see, Mr. Dowd," said the under officer, saluting. "Shall I send him here, sir?"

"If you will," Dowd said, and remained himself to talk pleasantly to the American girl.

After a time another man in uniform approached the spot. He was not a young man; yet he was smooth-faced, ruddy, and had a smart way about him. But his countenance was lined and there was a small scar just below his eye on one cheek.

"Mr. Dykman, Miss Fielding," Dowd said. "Is Mr. Dykman the officer whom you saw, Miss Fielding?"

Dykman bowed with a military manner. Ruth eyed him quietly. He did not look like an Englishman, that was sure.

"This is the officer I saw this morning," she said, confidently. She felt that she could not be mistaken, although she had not noted his manner and countenance so directly at the time indicated. He looked surprised but said nothing in rejoinder, glancing at Mr. Dowd, instead, for an explanation.

"We are trying," said the first officer, "to identify a man—one of the crew—who was out of place on the deck here this morning during your watch, Mr. Dykman. About what time was it, Miss Fielding?"

"The sun was just coming up," she said, watching Dykman's face.

"There were various members of the deck

watch here then, sir," Dykman said respectfully. "We were washing decks."

"You came past here," Ruth said quietly, "and admonished the man for standing here. You told him he had no business aft."

The man wagged his head slowly and showed no remembrance of the incident by his expression of countenance. His eyes, she saw, were hard, and round, and blue.

"You intimated that he was a stoker," Ruth continued, with quite as much confidence as before.

Indeed, the more doubt seemed cast upon her statement the more confident she became. She could not understand why this man denied knowledge of the incident, unless——

She glanced at Dowd. He was frowning and had reddened. But he was not looking at her. He was looking at Dykman.

"Well, sir?" he snapped suddenly.

"No, sir. I do not remember the occurrence," the sub-officer said respectfully but with a finality there could be no mistaking.

"That will do, then," said Mr. Dowd, and waved his hand in dismissal.

Dykman bowed again and marched away. Ruth watched the face of the first officer closely. Had he shown the least suspicion of her she would have said no more. But, instead, he looked at

her frankly now that the sub-officer had gone, and demanded angrily:

"Now, what do you suppose that means? Are you positive you have identified Dykman?"

"He was the man who spoke to the stoker—yes."

"Then why the—ahem! Well! Why should he deny it?"

"It seems to clinch my argument," Ruth said. "There is something underhanded going on—some plot—some mystery. This Dykman must be in it."

"By Jove!"

"Have you known the man long?"

"He is a new member of the ship's company—as I am," admitted Dowd.

"He may be 'Boldig,'" said Ruth, smiling faintly.

"I will find out what is known of him," the first officer promised. "Meanwhile do you think you would like to look over the seamen and other members of the crew?"

"I do not think there would be any use in my doing so—not at present. They probably know what we are after and the flaxen-haired man will remain hidden. The boat is large."

"True," Dowd agreed thoughtfully. "And as we do not know his name it would be difficult to find him on the ship's roster. Besides, I do not

believe that Captain Hastings would allow further search. You see what kind of a man he is, Miss Fielding."

"Make no excuse, Mr. Dowd," she said hastily. "You have done all you can. I am sorry I started this in the first place. I merely considered it my duty to do so."

"I quite appreciate your attitude," he said, bowing over her hand. "And I think you did right. There is something on foot that must be investigated, Captain Hastings, or no Captain Hastings!"

He went away abruptly, and Ruth had time to think it over. She did not fancy the situation at all.

CHAPTER XII

THE MAN IN THE MOTOR BOAT

SHE felt that she had taken hold of something bigger than she could handle just at this time. Ruth really wanted to remain quiet—on deck or in her stateroom—and nurse her injured shoulder and fix her mind on the troubles that seemed of late to have assailed her.

There was trouble awaiting her at home at the Red Mill. Aunt Alvirah must be very ill, or Uncle Jabez Potter would never have written as he had. The miserly old miller was in a greatly perturbed state of mind. He and Aunt Alvirah would need Ruth's help and comfort. She looked forward to a very inactive and dull life at the Red Mill for a while.

After her activities in France, and in other places before she sailed as a Red Cross worker, home would indeed be dull. She loved Aunt Alvirah—even the old miller himself; but Ruth Fielding was not a stay-at-home body by nature and training.

She might have mental exercise in writing scenarios for the Alectrion Film Corporation. She had had good success in that work—and there was money in it. But it did not attract her now. Her work at the Clair hospital seemed to have unfitted her for her old interests and duties. In fact, she was not satisfied to be out of touch with active affairs while a state of war continued abroad.

The trouble at home, and the anxiety she felt for Tom's safety, served to put her in a most unhappy frame of mind. She surely would have given her mind to unpleasant reveries had not this matter which began with Irma Lentz come up.

This racked her mind instead of more serious troubles. Perhaps it was as well. Ruth disliked having been considered unwarrantably interfering, as Captain Hastings undoubtedly considered she had been.

She answered the second luncheon call and passed Irma Lentz coming out of the saloon-cabin. The woman with the eyeglasses looked her up and down, haughtily tossed her head, and passed on. Ruth was aware that several other first cabin passengers looked at her oddly. It was plain that some tale of Ruth's "mare's nest" had been circulated.

And this must be through Captain Hastings. Nobody else, she was sure, could have been tact-

less enough to tell Miss Lentz what Ruth had said. Had the short-haired "artist" taken others of the passengers into her confidence, or was that, too, the work of the steamship's commander?

At about this time there probably was not a steamship crossing the Atlantic of the character of the *Admiral Pekhard,* and with the number and variety of passengers she carried, on which there was not some kind of spy scare. So many dreadful things were happening at sea, and the Germans seemed so far-reaching and ruthless in their plots, that there was little wonder that this should be so.

It would have been the part of wisdom had Captain Hastings kept the matter quiet. Instead, the pompous little skipper had evidently revealed Ruth's suspicions to the very person most concerned—Miss Lentz. Through her, word must have been passed to the flaxen-haired man Ruth had seen talking with her, and likewise to the officer, Dykman, who must likewise be in the plot.

What would be the outcome? If there really was a conspiracy to harm the ship, either on the sea or after she docked at New York, had it been nipped in the bud? Or would it be carried through, whether or no?

There was so little but suspicion to bolster up Ruth Fielding's belief that she had no foundation upon which to build an actual accusation against

Miss Lentz and her associates, whoever they might be.

She felt the weakness of her case. There was, perhaps, some reason for Captain Hastings to doubt her word. But he should not have revealed her private information to the passengers. That not only was unfair to Ruth but made it almost impossible for her to prove her case.

She ate her lunch with the help of the steward, for her Red Cross friend had eaten and gone. When she returned to the open deck she saw Miss Lentz the center of a group of eagerly talking passengers. There were two wounded army officers in the group. They all stared curiously at Ruth Fielding as she passed. Nobody spoke to her. There was evidently being formed a cabal against her among the first cabin passengers.

Not that she particularly cared. There was really nobody she wished to be friendly with, and in ten days or so the ship would reach New York and the incident would be closed. That is, if nothing happened to retard the voyage.

She sought her own chair, which had been placed in a favored spot by the deck steward, and wrapped herself as well as she could in her rug, having only one hand to use. Nobody came to offer aid. She was being quite ostracized.

From where she sat she had a good view of the main deck and of all the ship forward of the

smoke stacks. The sea remained calm and the *Admiral Pekhard* plowed through it with some speed. Not a sail nor a banner of smoke was visible. They were a good way from land by now, and it was evident, too, that they were in no very popular steamship lane. With the submarines as active as they were, unconvoyed ships steered clear of well-known routes, where the German sea-monsters were most likely to lie in wait.

With nobody to distract her attention, Ruth took considerable present interest in the conning of the ship and the work of the seamen about the deck. She looked, too, for some figure that would suggest the flaxen-haired man she had seen talking with Miss Lentz at dawn.

Dykman was on duty as watch officer now. Ruth felt that he must be one of the conspirators. Otherwise he could not have so blandly denied knowledge of the flaxen-haired man who talked German.

The *Admiral Pekhard* was a well-furnished boat, as has been said. Besides the lifeboats swung at her davits, there were nests of smaller boats forward. And just in front of where Ruth Fielding sat there was a canvas-covered motor craft of small size. There was a larger motor launch lashed on the main deck astern of where Ruth's chair was established.

She noted, after a time, that some of the points

lashing the canvas cover of the small launch forward of her station were unfastened. Everything else about the covered craft was taut and shipshape. Ruth wondered at the displacement of the loosened cords.

And then, vastly to her surprise, she saw the canvas stir. Something, or somebody, was beneath it. Whatever it was under the canvas cover, its movements were made with extreme caution.

Ruth was more puzzled than alarmed. She had heard of people stowing themselves away upon steamships, and she wondered at first if such were the explanation of the unknown, lying in the motor launch.

Should she speak to Mr. Dowd about this? Then, considering what had followed her interference in circumstances that happened at dawn here on the deck of the steamship, she hesitated to do so. She did not wish to get into further trouble.

But she watched the opening in the canvas cover. More than once within the next hour she observed the boat cover wrinkle and move, as whatever was beneath it squirmed and crept about.

Then, quite expectedly, she saw a face at the opening. The canvas was lifted slightly and a forehead and pair of eyes were visible for a moment.

The fact that somebody was hiding in the launch could not be denied. Yet it really was none of Ruth Fielding's business. This might have nothing at all to do with Miss Lentz, the flaxen-haired man, and Dykman.

She watched the place warily. If the man under the canvas saw her watching he would be warned, of course, that his presence was discovered. She must speak to Mr. Dowd most casually if she desired to inform the first officer of this mysterious circumstance.

Nor could she get up and look for the first officer. While she was gone the man in the motor boat might slip out and escape. Ruth did not propose to put herself a second time in a position where her word might be doubted.

While she remained in her chair the person hiding in the boat would surely not come out. She did not wish to send a message to Mr. Dowd in such a way that her motive for bringing him here would be suspected.

The first officer was not on the bridge; so it was not his watch on duty. Ruth beckoned a deck steward, tipped him, and requested him to bring her a pencil, a sheet of paper, and envelope from the ship's writing room. She was taking no chances with a verbal message.

The man fulfilled her request. Meanwhile nobody else seemed to notice the man peering out

from the canvas cover of the motor boat. Indeed, the fellow had disappeared now and was lying quiet.

Ruth penciled the following sentences on the paper: "There is a stowaway in the small motor boat forward of where I am sitting. I will not move until you can come and investigate. R. F."

She sealed this in the envelope, doing it all in her lap so that she could not be observed from the boat. Then she wrote Mr. Dowd's name upon the envelope.

The steward came back and she whispered to him to take the note to Mr. Dowd and deliver it into the first officer's own hand—to nobody else. As the man started away Ruth for some reason turned her head.

Across the deck stood Irma Lentz. Her black eyes flashed into Ruth's, and the woman seemed about to start toward her. Then she wheeled and swiftly went forward.

Had she seen the letter Ruth had sent to the chief officer? Did she suspect to whom Ruth had written—and the object of the note? And, above all, did she suspect that Ruth had discovered the man hiding in the motor boat?

CHAPTER XIII

IT COMES TO A HEAD

As THE minutes passed, lengthening into first the quarter and then the half hour, Ruth Fielding's impatience grew. The steward did not come back to the deck. Nor did Chief Officer Dowd return any reply to her note.

The situation became more and more irksome for the girl of the Red Mill. She believed that Irma Lentz considered her a personal enemy. Perhaps the woman had influence over the steward with whom the note to Mr. Dowd had been entrusted. Ruth began to feel that she was surrounded by spies, and that serious trouble would break out upon the *Admiral Pekhard* within a short time.

If she left her seat to search for Mr. Dowd, or to confer with anybody else, the man she believed was hiding in the motor boat not ten yards from her chair might escape. Who he was she could only suspect. Why he was hiding there was quite beyond her imagination.

It was Captain Hastings who appeared first upon the open deck. He did not go immediately to the bridge, nor did he bow right and left to the ladies as was usually his custom. He came directly past Ruth and stared at her through his little squinting eyes in no friendly fashion. Ruth did not speak to him.

Captain Hastings took up a position by the rail not twenty yards from the girl's chair. Several passengers gathered about him; but she saw that the commander of the *Admiral Pekhard* did not lose sight of her. He was there for a purpose—that was sure.

She wondered if the steward, playing her false, had given her note addressed to Mr. Dowd to Captain Hastings? She felt that apprehension nearly all feel when "something is about to happen." In fact, she had never felt more uncomfortable mentally in her life than at that moment.

The sun was going down now, for she had spent most of the afternoon since luncheon in her chair. The watches had been changed long since and she knew that on a sailing vessel this would be the second dog watch. Some of the crew were at supper. The bugle for the first-cabin call to dinner would soon sound.

She desired to go to her stateroom to freshen her toilet for dinner; yet, should she desert her post? Was Mr. Dowd merely delayed in coming

to answer her note? Should she take the bull by the horns and tell Captain Hastings himself of the presence of the stowaway in the motor boat?

In this hesitating frame of mind she lingered for some time. Although the sea was calm, there was a haze being drawn over the sky as the sun disappeared below the western rim of the ocean, and it bade fair to be a dark evening. The wind whistled shrilly through the wire stays. There was a foreboding atmosphere, it seemed to Ruth Fielding, about the great steamship.

A dull explosion sounded from somewhere deep in the hold of the *Admiral Pekhard.* The ship trembled from truck to keelson. Screams of frightened passengers instantly broke out. Captain Hastings, at the rail, whirled to look toward the engine-room companionway.

Out of this door, just ahead of a volume of smoke or steam, dashed one of his officers. Ruth, who had got out of the reclining chair as quickly as her injured shoulder would allow, saw that this excited man was Dykman.

"An explosion in the boiler room, sir!" he cried, loud enough for everybody in the vicinity to hear him. "The engines are out of commission and I think the ship is sinking."

It seemed as though any ship's officer with good sense would have told the commander privately of the catastrophe. But immediately the full na-

ture of the disaster was made known to the excited and terrified passengers.

"My heavens, Dykman!" squealed Captain Hastings, "you don't mean to say it is a torpedo? We've seen no periscope."

"I don't know what it is; but the whole place is full of steam and boiling water. We could not see the entire extent of the damage; but the water——"

He intimated that the water was coming in from the outside. Then, suddenly, the bugles and bells began, all over the ship, to signal the command for "stations." The engines had stopped and the steamship began to rock a little, for there was quite a swell on. Some of the passengers began screaming again. They thought the *Admiral Pekhard* was already going down.

The tramp of men running along the decks, the shouts of the officers, and the continued screaming of some of the passengers created such a pandemonium that Ruth was confused. She knew that Captain Hastings had leaped to the bridge ladder and was now giving orders through a trumpet regarding the preparation of the boats for lowering.

One gang of men was unlashing the large motor boat and carrying davit ropes to it. That was the captain's boat, and it would hold at least forty of the ship's company.

Ruth began to wonder what boat she would go in. She realized that she was quite alone—that there was nobody to aid her. Tom had foreseen this. He had wished to accompany her across the ocean to be able to aid her if necessity arose.

And here was necessity!

Ruth saw some of the passengers running below, and was reminded that she was not at all prepared to get into an open boat and drift about the sea until rescued. There were several important papers and valuables in her stateroom, too. She moved toward the first cabin entrance.

Stewards were bringing the helpless wounded up to the deck on stretchers. No matter how small Ruth's opinion might be of Captain Hastings as a man, he seemed neglecting no essential matter now that his ship was in danger.

From the bridge he directed the filling and lowering of the first boats. He ordered the crew and stokers who came pouring from below, to stand by their respective boats, but not to lower them until word was given. Each officer was in his place. The stewards were evacuating the wounded as fast as possible and were to see that every passenger came on deck.

But Ruth did not see Mr. Dowd. The Chief Officer, who should have had a prominent part in this work, had not appeared. The girl went below, wondering about this.

As she approached her stateroom, Irma Lentz, well-coated and bearing two handbags, appeared from her stateroom. The black-eyed woman did not seem very much disturbed by the situation. She even stopped to speak to Ruth.

"Ah-h!" she exclaimed in a low tone. "Your friend, Mr. Dowd, fell down the after companionway and is hurt. They took him to his room. Perhaps you would like to know," and she laughed as she passed swiftly on toward the open deck.

The information terrified Ruth. For the first time since the explosion in the boiler room, the girl of the Red Mill considered the possibility of this all being a plot to wreck the *Admiral Pekhard*—a plot among some of the ship's company, both passengers and crew!

The mystery of which she had caught a single thread that morning at dawn when she had observed this black-eyed woman talking with the German-looking seaman, or stoker, was now divulged.

These people—Irma Lentz, the flaxen-haired man, Dykman (if he was one of the plotters) and perhaps others, had brought them all to this perilous situation. The German conspirators had, after all, been willing to risk their own lives in an attempt to sink the British ship.

She was but one day from port; it was not im-

probable that the ship's company would reach land in comparative safety. The two motor boats could tow the lifeboats, and if a storm did not arise they might all reach either the English or the French coast in safety.

Ruth was so disturbed by Irma Lentz's statement that she did not immediately turn toward her own room. She knew where Mr. Dowd's cabin was, and she hurried toward it.

It seemed sinister that the chief officer should have been injured just as she had sent word to him about the stowaway in the small motor boat. Ruth was convinced, without further evidence, that her discovery and attempt to reach Mr. Dowd with the information had caused his injury and had hastened the explosion.

She did not believe the latter was caused by a torpedo from a lurking submarine. The conspirators aboard the *Admiral Pekhard* had deliberately brought about the catastrophe.

And it smote her, too, that Mr. Dowd might now be neglected in his cabin. When the passengers and crew left in the small boats, the first officer would, perhaps, be lying helpless in his berth.

She reached the door of the officer's cabin, and knocked upon the panel. There was nobody in sight in this passage and she heard no movement inside the first officer's room. Again she knocked.

At last there was a stirring inside. A voice mumbled:

"Yes? Yes? Eight bells? I will be right up."

"Mr. Dowd! Mr. Dowd!" Ruth called. "Wake up! The ship is sinking!"

"I'll be right with you, boy," said the officer, more briskly, but evidently not altogether himself.

"This is Ruth Fielding, Mr. Dowd!" cried the girl, hammering again on the door. "Do you need help? Come on deck quickly. The ship is sinking!"

"What's *that?*"

He was evidently aroused now. The door was snapped open and he appeared at the aperture just as he had risen from his berth—in shirt and trousers. His head was bandaged as though he wore a turban.

"What is that you say, Miss Fielding?" he repeated.

"Come quickly, Mr. Dowd!" she begged. "The ship is sinking. Those people have blown it up."

"Then there was something wrong!" cried the officer. "Did—did Captain Hastings come to you? I—I gave him your note after I fell——"

"He did nothing but wait until those people did their worst," declared Ruth angrily. "It is

too late to talk about it now. Hurry!" and she turned away to seek her own stateroom.

It was fast growing dark outside. There were no lights turned on along the saloon deck. She saw not a soul as she hurried to her room. Everybody—even the stewards and officers—seemed to have got out upon the upper deck. She heard much noise there and believed some of the boats were being lowered.

She unlocked her stateroom door and entered. When she tried to turn on the electric light, she found that the wires were dead. Of course, if the boilers were blown up, the electric generating motors would stop as well as the steam engines. The ship would be in darkness.

She hastily scrambled such valuables as she could find into her toilet bag. Her money and papers she stowed away inside her dress. They were wrapped in oilskin, if she should be wet. Ruth was cool enough. She considered all possibilities at this time of emergency.

At least she considered all possibilities but one. That never for a moment entered her mind.

It was true that while she dressed more warmly and secured a blanket from her berth to wrap around herself over her coat, she was aware that the noise on the upper deck had ceased. But she did not realize the significance of this.

Being all alone, she had much difficulty in ar-

raying herself as she wished. Her shoulder was stiff and she could not use her left arm very much without causing the shoulder to hurt excruciatingly. So she was long in getting out of the room again.

Just as she did so she heard a man shouting up the passage:

"Anybody here? Get out on deck! Last call! The boats are leaving!"

The shout really startled Ruth. She had no idea there was any chance of her being left behind. She left her stateroom door open and started to run through the narrow corridor.

Not six feet from the door she tripped over something. It was a cord stretched taut across the passage, fastened at a height of about a foot from the deck!

Helplessly, with her hands full and the blanket over her right arm, Ruth pitched forward on her face. She struck her head on the deck with sufficient force to cause unconsciousness. With a single groan she rolled over on her back and lay still.

CHAPTER XIV

A BATTLE IN THE AIR

THE first few seconds which passed after Ralph Stillinger and Tom Cameron descried the huge envelope of the Zeppelin beneath their airplane in the fog were sufficient to allow the American ace to regain his self-possession. If his passenger was frightened by the nearness of the German airship he did not betray that fact.

The thundering of the motors of the great airship, as well as the clatter of their own engine, made speech between the two Americans quite impossible. But the meaning of Stillinger's gestures was not lost on Tom.

Immediately the latter sprang to the machine gun. The three pursuit planes with which they had been skirmishing were now out of mind, as well as out of sight. If they could cripple the Zeppelin the victory would be far greater than bringing disaster to one of the *Tauben*.

The Zeppelin was aimed seaward. She doubtless had started upon a coast raid along the Eng-

lish shore. If the Americans could bring her down they would achieve something that would count gloriously in this great work of fighting the Hun in the air.

To pitch down upon the envelope of the great machine and empty a clip of cartridges into it might do the Zeppelin a deal of harm, but it would not wreck it. A complete wreck was what Stillinger and Tom wished to make of the German airship.

The American pilot's intention was immediately plain to Tom. He shut down on the speed and allowed the airplane to fall behind the German ship. The object was to trail the Zeppelin and pour the machine-gun bullets into the steering gear of the great airship—even, perhaps, to sweep her deck of the crew.

The fog was thinning—No! they were shooting out of the cloud. The sunlight suddenly illuminated both Zeppelin and airplane. Both must have been revealed to observers on the ground and in the air.

The presence of the American airplane, if unsuspected before by the crew of the Zeppelin, was now revealed to them. Tom, bending sideways to look down past the machine gun, saw the entire afterdeck of the Zeppelin. There were at least a dozen men standing there, staring up at the darting airplane.

Tom shot a glance back at Stillinger. The machine tipped at that instant. The pilot waved an admonishing hand. Tom seized the crank of the gun and turned to look down upon the German airship.

In that instant the crew of the latter had sprung to action. Their surprise at the nearness of the airplane was past. Their commander stood, hanging to a stay with one hand and shouting orders through a trumpet held in the other hand. At least, Tom Cameron presumed he was shouting.

All he could hear was the thuttering roar of the Zeppelin's motors and the clash of their own engine. These noises, with the shrieking of the rushing wind made every other sound inaudible.

The American machine was tipping. She was not far behind the Zeppelin, nor far above it. The muzzle of the machine gun would soon come into line with the after deck of the Zeppelin. Then——

Suddenly a flash of flame and a balloon of smoke was spouted from a small mortar amidships of that deck. Instantly a shell burst almost in Tom's face and eyes.

If the young fellow cringed as he crouched behind the machine gun, it was no wonder. That was a very narrow escape.

He glanced back at Stillinger. The pilot had

dropped one of the levers and was holding his left wrist tightly. Tom could see something red running through Stillinger's fingers—blood!

Shrapnel was flying all about the airplane. There was a second puff of smoke and flame from the mortar on the Zeppelin. Tom heard the twang of a cut stay. The airplane rolled sideways with a sickening dip—but then righted itself.

This was a kind of fighting Tom Cameron knew nothing about. He did not know what to do. Pivoted as the machine gun was, he could not depress the muzzle sufficiently to bring the Zeppelin's deck into range. Was the machine out of control? If the nose of it dipped a bit more he could do something.

Another burst of shrapnel, and he felt something like a red-hot iron searing his right cheek. He put up his gloved hand and brought it away spotted with crimson. The Hun certainly was getting them!

He looked back at Stillinger. To his horror he saw that the man was slumped down in his seat, held there by his belt. Tom Cameron did not know the first thing about driving an airplane!

Again a shell burst near the rocking machine. It did no harm; but it showed that the Germans were getting an almost perfect range.

Tom Cameron was not a coward. He gripped

his even upper teeth on his full lower lip, and by that sign only showed that he knew disaster was coming. Indeed, it had come the next second!

The tail of the airplane shot up and the nose pitched to a sharp angle. He heard the explosion of the shell even as he started the chatter of the machine gun. In that short breath of time the muzzle of his weapon was pitched to the right angle, and a swarm of bullets swept the afterdeck of the Zeppelin.

He knew the tail of the airplane had been splintered and that the machine was bound to fall. But as it poised on its wings for a few moments, he poured in the shot—indeed, he finished the clip of cartridges.

The man at the Zeppelin shell-thrower fell back and rolled into the scuppers. Another—plainly an officer from his dress—crashed to the deck. He saw the other members of the crew running to try to escape the hail of bullets. Ah, if he could only have accomplished this before the airplane was wrecked!

And that it was wrecked, he could see. He glanced over his shoulder. Stillinger was no longer in his seat. Indeed, the seat itself was not there! The entire rear part of the airplane was torn away, and his friend and college-mate had fallen.

Those next few seconds were to be the most thrilling of all Tom Cameron's life.

The airplane was plunging downward, seemingly right on top of the Zeppelin. Then intuitively he realized that it would just about clear the German airship.

He held no more guarantee for his life if he clung to the airplane than poor Stillinger had in falling free. It was a swift spin and a crash to the earth—death beyond peradventure!

The spread wings of the airplane still held the wrecked machine poised. But in a moment it would slip forward, nose down, and "take the spin." Tom scrambled over the gun and over the armored nose of the airplane. He swung himself through the stays. The airplane plunged —and so did he!

But he flung himself free of the stays. Like a frog diving from the bank of a pool, the American cast himself from the airplane, full thirty feet, to the deck of the German airship!

A taut stay of the Zeppelin broke his fall. He landed on all fours. Before he could rise two of the Germans leaped upon him and he was crushed, face-downward, on the deck.

The fellows who had seized him seemed of a mind to cast him over the rail. They dragged him to his feet, forcing him that way. He expected the next minute to be spinning in the track

of the airplane toward the earth, five thousand feet or more below.

But suddenly there appeared out of the cabin, or "dog-house" slung amidships of the great envelope, the officer that Tom had first seen with the trumpet. Through that instrument he now roared an order in German that the American did not understand.

The latter was released. He staggered to the middle of the deck, panting and with scarcely strength remaining to hold him on his feet. He saw the officer beckoning him forward.

He could not see what any of these fellows looked like, for they were all masked, as he was himself. They were dressed in garments of skin, with the hair left on the hide—a queer-looking company indeed. Tom staggered toward the officer.

He was motioned to go into the cabin. The officer came after him and closed the door. At once the American realized that the place was—to a degree—sound-proof.

The German removed his helmet and Tom was glad to unbuckle the straps of his own. The first words he heard were in good English:

"This is the first time I have taken a prisoner. It is a notable event. Will you drink this cordial, *Mein Herr?* It is an occasion worthy of a libation."

His captor had opened a small cabinet fastened to the wall and produced a screw-topped decanter. He poured a colorless liquid into two tiny glasses, and presented one to Tom. The latter would have taken almost anything just then. The stuff was warming and smelled strongly of anise.

"Yes, you are the first prisoner I have heard of taken in this way. And, oddly enough, I may be bearing you homeward, only I shall be unable to allow you to land upon the 'tight little isle'—you so call it, no?"

"You are making one mistake," Tom said, finally finding his voice. "I am not an Englishman. I am American."

"Indeed? But it matters not," and the German shrugged his shoulders. "You will go back with us to Germany as a prisoner. But first you will accompany us on our bomb-dropping expedition. London is doomed to suffer again."

Tom said no more. This *ober-leutnant* was a fresh-faced, rather dandy-like appearing person—typical of the Prussian officer-caste. His cheerful statement that he purposed dropping his cargo of bombs over the city of London brought a sharp retort to Tom's tongue—which he was wise enough not to utter.

A subordinate officer looked in at the forward entrance to the cabin, and asked a question. The *leutnant* arose.

"I go to con the ship. We shall soon be over the sea. You, *Mein Herr,* must be placed in durance, I fear. Come this way."

He did not even take the automatic pistol from Tom's holster. Really, he knew, as did Tom, that to make any attempt against the lives of his captors would have been too ridiculous to contemplate. Tom Cameron arose quietly to follow the *leutnant.*

At the forward end of this cabin, or car, there was a door beside the one which gave exit to the forward deck. The German opened this narrow door, and Tom saw a small closet with a barred window. There was a cushioned seat, which might even serve as a berth, but very little else in the compartment.

He was ordered into this place, and entered. The door was closed behind him and bolted. He was left to his own devices and to thoughts which were, to say the least, disheartening.

He pitched the padded helmet and goggles he had taken off into a corner and pressed his face close to the glass of the barred window. Again they were smothered in fog. He could not see to the prow of the great ship. He wondered how the officer could steer the Zeppelin save by compass. This fog was a thick curtain.

Yet the Germans would cross the sea, of course, and find their way over London. He had heard

Englishmen talk of the damage done and the lives sacrificed—mostly those of women and children—in these dreadful raids. And he was to be a passenger while the Zeppelin performed its horrid task!

Tom Cameron had recovered quickly from his fright and the shock of his landing on the airship. He was convinced that nobody had ever before done just what he had done. And as he had been successful in performing this hazardous venture, he began to believe that he might do more—perform other wonders.

It was not his vanity that suggested this thought. Tom Cameron was quite as free of the foible of conceit as could be imagined. He was earnestly desirous of doing something to balk these Germans in their determination to get to the English shore and bomb London and its vicinity.

Gradually his eyes grew blind to what was going on upon the forward deck of the Zeppelin. He was thinking—he was scheming. His whole thought was given to the desire of his heart: How might he thwart the wicked plans of the Hun?

CHAPTER XV

ABANDONED

RUTH FIELDING came to consciousness with an instantly keen physical, as well as mental, perception of where she was, what had happened, and all that the accident she had suffered meant. Indeed, it had been no accident that cast her to the deck outside her stateroom door.

It was the result of premeditated evil. The man shouting the warning that all boats were leaving the supposedly sinking *Admiral Pekhard,* had intended to bring her running from her room. The cord stretched across the passage was there to trip her.

As she struggled to her knees, picked up her bag, and gained her feet, Ruth realized, as in a flash of light, that the man who had shouted was Dykman, the under officer whom she had previously suspected. He was in the conspiracy with Irma Lentz and the flaxen-haired man—the latter, she was sure, having hidden in the small motor boat.

And what was now ahead? She had no idea how long she had lain unconscious. Nor did she hear a sound from the deck above.

Had she been abandoned on the sinking ship, even by Mr. Dowd, the first officer? That Captain Hastings had neglected to see that all the passengers were taken off the *Admiral Pekhard* did not greatly surprise Ruth. She had a very poor opinion of the pompous little skipper.

But Mr. Dowd!

She stumbled out of the dark passage and found the saloon stairway. The door at the top was closed. She had to put down her bag to open it. Her shoulder pained like a toothache, and she could not use her left hand at all.

She finally stumbled out upon the open deck. Darkness had shut down on the ship. There was not a light anywhere aboard that she could see. The ship was rocking gently to the swell. It did not seem to her as though it was any deeper in the sea than it had been when last she was above deck.

But one certain fact could not be denied. The davits were stripped of boats. Every lifeboat was gone! She looked aft and saw that the big motor launch had likewise been put off. Forward the deck was clear, too. The boat in which she had observed the stowaway had disappeared.

She was trapped. She believed herself alone

on a deserted ship in a trackless ocean. She had no means of leaving the *Admiral Pekhard;* surely had the steamship not been about to go down, it would not have been abandoned by all—passengers, crew, and officers.

Captain Hastings, the Red Cross officer, even Mr. Dowd, had all quite forgotten her. Her enemies (she must consider Irma Lentz and Dykman personal foes) had made it impossible for her to escape in any of the boats. Perhaps they feared that she knew much more of the plot than she really did know. Therefore their determination to make her escape impossible.

Suddenly she saw a flash of light far out over the sea. It bobbed up and down for several minutes. Then it disappeared. She believed it must be one of the small boats that had got safely away from the *Admiral Pekhard* The disappearance of the light seemed to close all communication between the abandoned girl and humankind.

She had dropped her bag. As the steamship rolled gently the bag slid toward the rail. This brought her to sudden activity again. She went to recover the bag. And then she peered over the high rail, down at the phosphorescent surface of the sea.

It did not seem to Ruth as though the *Admiral Pekhard* had sunk a foot lower than before she left the deck to obtain her possessions. There

was something wrong somewhere! Rather, there was something right. The ship was not about to sink. Why, hours had passed since she had fallen and struck her head below near her stateroom! If the ship had been in such danger of sinking when the alarm to take to the boats was given, why was it not already awash by the waves that lapped the sides?

There was some great error. Captain Hastings must have been terribly misled by his officers regarding the condition of the ship. Much as she disliked the pompous little man, she was sure that he would not have knowingly deserted the steamship unless he had been convinced she was going down—and that quickly.

"But Mr. Dowd knew better," murmured Ruth. "Or he must have suspected there was something wrong. And Mr. Dowd—I do not believe he would have left the ship without making sure that I was safe."

The thought was so convincing that it bred in her mind another and, she realized, perhaps a ridiculous one. Yet she was so impressed by it that she turned back to the open companionway. She started down into the saloon-cabin. But it was so dark there that she hesitated.

Then, of a sudden, she remembered the pocket-lamp that must be in this very toilet-bag she carried. She always tried to have such a thing by

her, especially when she traveled. She opened the bag and searched among its contents.

Her hand touched and then brought forth the electric torch. She pressed the switch and the spotlight of the bulb shot right into the face of the great chronometer in its glass case, hanging above the companionway steps.

It was half after nine, and she heard the faint chime of the clock on the instant—three bells. Why! she must have been more than two hours unconscious below. Of course the boats, if they had been rowed at once away from the supposedly sinking ship, would be now quite out of sight. Their lamps were hidden from her sight; and as there were no outside lights on the ship, she would, of course, be invisible to the crews of the small boats.

If the order had been given to make for the nearest point of land, the people who had abandoned the *Admiral Pekhard* might easily believe the steamship under the sea long since.

This thought was but a flash through her troubled mind. The keener supposition that had urged her below still inspired her. By aid of the hand lamp she could make her path through the cabins. She crossed the dining room and the writing room and library. This way was the opening of the passage on which were the doors of the officers' cabins.

She reached Dowd's door. She had been here before; it was she, indeed, who had roused him to the knowledge that the ship was being abandoned. Could it be possible——

She pushed open the door without opposition, for it was unlatched. She shot the spotlight of the hand lamp into the small room. The bed was empty.

Of course, it could not be possible that Mr. Dowd, chief officer of the ship, had been left behind as she had been.

Yet, she could open the door only half way. There was something behind it that acted as a stopper. Ruth peered around the door and at the floor. Her lamp shone upon the unbooted feet of a man. She shot the ray of light along his limbs and body. At the far end, almost against the outside wall of the stateroom, was the turbanned head of First Officer Dowd!

Ruth could scarcely gasp the officer's name, and in her amazement she removed her thumb from the switch. Her lamp went out. In the darkness she heard Mr. Dowd breathing stertorously. He was, then, not dead!

Ruth Fielding was far too sensible and acute in understanding to be long overwhelmed by any such discovery. Indeed, she felt a certain satisfaction in finding the man here. Even Mr. Dowd, ill and helpless, was better than no companion at

all upon the steamship. One fear, at least, immediately rolled off her mind.

Used as she had become to hospital work, she went at once to work upon the victim of this outrage. For at first she thought he must have been injured a second time. Perhaps the man who had stretched that cord to trip her and had shouted to her down the passage, had first overpowered Mr. Dowd.

It proved to be that the man was merely asleep. But he was sleeping very heavily, very unnaturally. Ruth had seen people under the effect of opiates before, and she knew what this meant. The chief officer of the *Admiral Pekhard* had been drugged.

When she had previously spoken to him and roused him after he was hurt, she remembered now that he had not seemed himself. It was something besides the blow on his head that troubled him. Ruth wondered who had given him the opiate, and in what form.

But of a surety, both the chief officer and she had been deliberately placed in such condition that they could not answer the call to abandon ship! Evil people had been at work here. The conspirators feared that Ruth and Mr. Dowd knew more than they really did know, and they had planned that the two should sink with the *Admiral Pekhard*.

Only, by the mercy of Providence, or by a vital

mistake on the part of the plotters, the steamship did not seem to be on the point of sinking. Ruth believed that that danger was not immediate.

She gave her attention to Mr. Dowd while she was thinking of these facts. She bathed his head and face, slapped his hands, and finally put to his nose strong smelling-salts which she found in her bag. The man stirred, and groaned, and finally opened his eyes.

He seemed to recognize Ruth at once. But the power of the opiate was still upon his brain. He could not quickly shake it off. He struggled to his feet by her aid and by clinging to his berth. He stared at her, groping in his mind for the reason for his situation.

"Miss Fielding!" he muttered. "Yes, yes. I am coming at once. The ship is sinking, you say?"

"Oh, Mr. Dowd! everybody has gone now and left us. We are too late to go in any of the boats. But I do not believe the ship is sinking, after all."

"They—did they blow it up?" questioned the man, striving to pull himself together. "I—I—— Why, Miss Fielding, what is the matter with me? I must have neglected my duty shamefully. Captain Hastings——"

"He has gone without us. Certainly he did not strive to be sure that everybody was off the ship

before he left. He evidently must have left it to his subordinates to do that. And I am sure they were not all trustworthy."

She swiftly repeated her own experience. The bruise gained by her fall over the taut cord was quite visible on her forehead. But the smart of it Ruth did not mind now. There were many other things of more importance.

"It looks like treachery all the way through," groaned Mr. Dowd. "I remember now. I fell down the companionway—and I could not understand why, for the ship was not rolling. You say you suspect Dykman? So do I. He was right there when I fell, and it seemed to me afterward that I was tripped by something at the top of the steps.

"But I was so confused—why, yes, you came and aroused me once, did you not, Miss Fielding?"

"Yes. Somebody must have given you an opiate. Who bandaged your head, Mr. Dowd?" she asked.

"The surgeon. He was here and fixed me up. He—he gave me a drink that he said would fix me all right."

"It did," the girl returned grimly. "It may have been he meant you no harm. Possibly he thought a long sleep was what you needed. But, then, why did he not remember you when the ship

was abandoned? He must have known you would be helpless."

"It seems strange," admitted Mr. Dowd. "Kreuger is the surgeon's name. Of course, the name smacks of Germany. But—but if we are going to distrust everybody with a German name, where shall we be?"

"Safer, perhaps," Ruth said, with rather grim lips. "In this case, at least, the doctor seems to have done quite as the conspirators would have had him. They plainly feared that both you and I suspected too much, and they did not intend that we should escape from this ship."

"Come!" he said, having struggled into his vest and coat and seized his uniform cap. "Let us go up on deck and see what the promise is. Here! I will light this lantern; that will give us a steadier light than your torch.

"I am glad you are such a plucky young woman, Miss Fielding," he added, as he lit his lantern. "One need not be afraid of being wrecked in mid-ocean with you. We'll find some way of escape from this old barge, never fear."

Thus speaking cheerfully, he led the way out of the room and into the open cabins of the saloon deck. Ruth followed, glad enough to give up the leadership to him.

CHAPTER XVI

ON THE EDGE OF TRAGEDY

THEY went up to the open deck to meet the blackest night Ruth Fielding ever remembered to have seen. The impenetrable clouds seemed to hover just above the masts of the abandoned steamship.

The night air aided Mr. Dowd to recover his poise. It was plain that the narcotic influence of the drink the doctor had given him still affected his brain more than did the blow he had suffered in falling. Soon his mind was quite clear and his manner the same as usual.

"I am afraid, as you say, Miss Fielding, that we are alone on the ship. I do not hear a sound," he said.

"But you do not think the ship is sinking, do you, Mr. Dowd?" Ruth asked.

"She does not roll as though she was waterlogged in any degree. Nor can I see that she has any pitch, either to bow or stern. If the explosion was amidships—and you say it was in the

fireroom—I doubt if a hole torn in the outside of the ship would sink her.

"You see, the engine room and boilers are shut off from the rest of the ship, both fore and aft, by water-tight bulkheads. If these were closed when the accident occurred, or soon after, that middle compartment might fill—up to a certain point—and that would be all. She could not take in enough water to sink her by such means."

"But one would think Captain Hastings—or the engineer—or somebody—would have discovered the truth," Ruth said, in doubt.

"You'd think so," admitted Mr. Dowd. "But there was a great deal of excitement, without doubt. If the water rushed in and put out the fires, and the place filled with steam, until that steam cleared the situation must have looked much worse than it really was.

"You see the ship was abandoned so quickly, that I doubt if the engineers could have learned just how serious the danger was. They must all have been panic-stricken."

"Your Captain Hastings as well," said Ruth scornfully.

"I am afraid so," admitted the chief officer. "But the captain must have been misled by the under officers. I do not believe he showed the white feather. He had the responsibility of the passengers—especially of those wounded—on his

mind. We must give him credit for making a clean get-away," and in the lantern-light Ruth saw that he smiled.

"I hope they are all safe," she responded reflectively. "The poor things! To have to drift about in open boats all night!"

"We are not far from land, of course," said Mr. Dowd. "And it is a wonder that one of the patrol boats has not crossed our track. Hold on!"

"Yes?" said the startled young woman.

"What about the radio? Didn't they send a wireless? Couldn't they have called for help?"

"Oh, I never thought of the wireless at all," Ruth confessed. "And I am sure it was not used at first—not while I was on deck."

"Strange! With two operators—Rollife and an assistant—how could they neglect such a chance?"

"I heard nothing about it," repeated Ruth.

"Come on. Let's look and see," said the chief officer of the steamship. "Something is dead wrong here. Sparks surely would not have left his post unless the radio had completely broken down. Why, if we could manipulate the radio we'd call for help now—you and I, Miss Fielding."

He led the way swiftly along the deck. The radio station had been built into the forward

house, for the *Admiral Pekhard* was an old steamship, her keel having been laid long before Marconi made his dream come true.

The staff from which the antennae were strung shot up into the darkness farther than they could well see. There was a single small window far up on either side of the house for circulation of air only. There seemed to be no life about the radio room.

Mr. Dowd tried the door. It did not yield. He shook it—or tried to—crying:

"Sparks! Sparks! Hey! Where are you?"

He was answered by a voice from inside the radio room. It was not a pleasant voice, and the words it first uttered were not polite, to say the least. The man inside ended by demanding:

"What in the name of Mike was meant by locking me into this room?"

"Great Land!" gasped Dowd. "It's Rollife himself."

"And you know darned well it's Roliffe," pursued the radio man. "Let me come out!" and he went on to roll out threats that certainly were not meant for Ruth's ears.

But to let the man out of his prison was not easy. Dowd found that two long spikes had been driven through the door and frame above and below the doorknob. He was some time in getting Rollife to listen to this explanation.

"Who is it? Dowd?" demanded the angry radio man at last.

"Yes," replied the first officer. "Who did this?"

Whoever it was who pinned the man into the room was threatened with a good many unpleasant happenings during the next few moments. Finally Dowd's voice penetrated to the operator's ears again.

"Hold your horses! There's a lady here. How shall I get you out, Sparks?"

"I don't give a hang *how* you do it," snarled the other. "But I want you to do it mighty quick—and then lead me to the man who nailed me up."

"Wait," said Dowd. "I'll get a screwdriver and take off the hinges of the door. Then you can push outwards."

"What the deuce has happened, anyway?" demanded Rollife, as the first officer of the *Admiral Pekhard* started away.

Ruth thought she would better answer before the imprisoned radio man broke out afresh. She told him simply what had happened, and why it had happened, as she presumed.

"It was Dykman nailed me up—the cur!" growled the radio man. "Then he monkeyed with the wires outside there. He put the radio out of commission, all right. That was before

the explosion. My door was nailed almost on the very minute the old ship was hit. But why doesn't she sink?"

"I do not believe she is going to sink, Mr. Rollife," said Ruth. "Oh, if you could only repair your aerial wires, you might call for help!"

"Let me out of here," growled the radio operator, "and I'll find some way of sending an S O S —don't fear!"

Mr. Dowd came back from the engine room where he had secured a screwdriver. He set to work removing the screws from the hinges of the radio room door.

"I do not believe that the explosion caused any serious damage to the ship itself," said he. "The fireroom is full of water; but it looks to me as though a seacock had been opened. I think the explosion was on the inside—a bomb thrown into one of the fires, perhaps."

"What's that you say?" demanded Rollife, from inside the room. "No likelihood of the old tub sinking?"

"Not at all! Not at all!"

"Well, I certainly am relieved," said the radio man. "I've been conjuring up all kinds of horrors in here."

"Huh!" exploded Dowd. "You were asleep till I pounded on the door."

"Oh, well, maybe I lost myself for a moment," confessed Rollife. "Anyhow, I made up my mind I was done for when I could make nobody listen to me after my door was nailed. They certainly had it in for me."

"Where was your assistant?" Dowd asked.

"That fellow is a squarehead," growled the radio man. "I suspected him from the start. Why, he couldn't talk American without saying 'already yet.' A Hun, sure as shooting."

That Rollife himself came from the United States there could be no doubt. His speech fully betrayed his nationality.

"He never came near me," he went on, speaking of his assistant. "He was some 'ham,' anyway! Graduate of one of these correspondence schools of telegraphy, I guess. His Morse was enough to drive one mad. Let me out, Dowd. I'll fix up those aerials and call somebody to our help in short order."

The first officer had accomplished his purpose. The screws were out of the hinges. Rollife was a big, strong fellow, and he drove his shoulder against the door with sufficient force the first time to push it outward at the back.

Then Mr. Dowd took hold of the edge of the door, and together they worked out the long nails and threw the useless door on the deck. Rollife came out into the light of the lantern which Ruth

held at one side. He was a big, fresh-faced man with a square jaw and a direct glance.

Ruth was glad to see him. He was such another man as the first officer of the steamship. If she had to be aboard an abandoned craft in such an emergency as this, she was glad that her companions were just such men as these two. She felt that they were resourceful and trustworthy.

Her mind, however, was by no means at ease. Mr. Dowd and Mr. Rollife were much more cheerful than Ruth. And it was not because they were any more courageous than the girl of the Red Mill. But Ruth thought of something that did not seem to have made any impression on the men's minds.

What had been the intention of the conspirators in abandoning the ship with the innocent members of her company? What would naturally be their expectation regarding the *Admiral Pekhard,* if she had not been put in condition to sink? If it was a German plot, surely the plotters did not intend to leave the steamship to drift, unharmed, until some patrol boat picked her up.

And the plotters knew the three castaways were on the vessel. What of the chief officer, the radio man, and Ruth herself? They had all been left for some purpose, that was sure. What was it?

Mr. Dowd and she had been allowed their freedom. Only Rollife had been locked up. And the

plotters must have known that in time Ruth or Dowd would have found means of releasing the radio man. Once released, it was more than probable Rollife would be able to discover what had been done to the aerials and repair them. It was quite sure that, before morning, those abandoned on the *Admiral Pekhard* would be able to send into the air an S O S for help.

There was something that she could not understand—something back of, and deeper, than the surface-work of the plotters. Perhaps that explosion in the fireroom had not been meant to injure the ship seriously. It was merely meant (as it did) to create panic.

It caused a situation serious enough to alarm the captain and all aboard. It seemed that all they could do was to flee from a ship that threatened to sink.

This situation might have been just what the plotters intended to create; because they would not wish to remain on the steamship when actual destruction was coming upon her!

They had escaped with the other members of the ship's company. Yet the steamship drifted in apparent safety. Was there something much more tragic threatening the *Admiral Pekhard?*

CHAPTER XVII

BOARDED

ROLLIFE was busy with his repairs on the aerials. Dowd was down in the engine room, or so Ruth supposed, and neither seemed suspicious of any further happening that would injure them. Rather, they considered themselves in full charge of a steamship that was in no actual or present danger.

Ruth Fielding's mental vision saw more clearly. There was something else coming—something far more tragic than anything that had thus far occurred.

There might be, hidden somewhere in the cargo-holds, time-bombs set to explode at a given moment. Her imagination was by no means running away with her when she visioned such a possibility.

Surely there was something still to happen to the *Admiral Pekhard*. If not, why then all the scurry to get away from the ship, the conspirators themselves included in the stampede?

Or had the ship's position been made known to a German submarine and would the U-boat soon appear to torpedo the British craft? This was not so far-fetched an idea. Only, the young woman was pretty sure that the explosion aboard the *Admiral Pekhard* had been advanced in time because of her own suspicions and the attempt she had made to get Mr. Dowd to investigate matters which the conspirators did not wish revealed.

Rollife had taken the lantern and Dowd had gone in search of another, Ruth presumed. By and by she began to wonder what was engaging the first officer's attention for so long, and she went to the engine-room hatch. Her small electric torch showed her the way.

To her amazement—and not a little to her fear at first—Ruth found the first officer lying upon the engine-room ladder. He was wet from head to foot, his turban of bandages had come off, displaying a bleeding scalp wound, and he was panting for breath.

"What has happened to you, Mr. Dowd?" she cried. "Did you fall into the water?"

"I dived into it," explained Dowd, grinning faintly. "That water in the fireroom didn't look right to me. I found the seacocks below, there. Two were open, as I suspected."

"Oh!"

"It was a deliberate attempt to scare us—and it succeeded. I shut off the cocks. This compartment could be pumped out if we had the men. Of course, the steam pumps can't be used. We have no donkey engine on deck. All the machinery is down there, half under water.

"There must have been more than Dykman and that man you saw talking to Miss Lentz, in the plot. Another man in the stoker-crew, perhaps. He flung a bomb into one of the furnaces after opening the seacocks. It was a well laid plot, Miss Fielding."

"Yes, I know," she said hastily. "But to what end?"

"How's that?"

"What was the final consideration? Why was this done? They must have known the ship would not sink. Then, what did they do all this for?"

"Why—by Jove!" gasped Dowd, "I had not thought of that, Miss Fielding."

He crept up the ladder and stood upon the deck, the water running from the garments that clung closely to his limbs and body.

"Doesn't it seem reasonable," she asked, "that the conspirators, whoever they were, should have some object rather than the simple desertion of a vessel that was not likely to sink?"

"It would seem so," he admitted, and his tone betrayed as much anxiety as she felt herself.

At the moment a shout from Rollife, the radio man, aroused them.

"I've found it!" he cried.

They went toward the radio room. He was busy in the light of the lantern on the roof of the house. He had tools and a small plumber's stove that he had found. He turned on the blast of the stove and began to weld certain wires.

"Can you fix it?" Dowd asked quietly.

"You bet I can, Mr. Dowd!" declared Rollife. "In half an hour I'll have the sparks shooting from those points up there. You watch."

Ruth looked at Mr. Dowd. Her unspoken question was: "Shall we take him into our confidence? Shall we tell him our fears?"

Before the first officer could answer her unspoken inquiry Ruth's sharp eyes glimpsed a light over his shoulder. It was an intermittent sparkle, and it was low down on the water. She remembered then the light she had seen for a moment when she had first come on deck after learning that the ship was abandoned.

"What is that?" she whispered, pointing.

Dowd wheeled to look. Instantly she saw by the light of her torch that he stiffened and his head came up. He gazed off across the water for quite two minutes. Then he said:

"It is a light in a small boat I believe. At first I thought it might be a submarine. But I do not

believe a submarine would show anything less than a searchlight in traveling on the surface at night."

"Oh! Who can it be?" murmured Ruth.

"You put a hard question, Miss Fielding. Surely it cannot be our friends coming back."

"What do you mean?"

"I mean a boat sent by Captain Hastings to make sure that nobody was left on the steamship."

"Do you consider that likely?" she asked.

"Well—no, I do not," he admitted.

"Then you think it may be people who have not our interest at heart?" was her quick demand.

"I am afraid I can give you no encouragement. I cannot imagine Captain Hastings abandoning the ship without believing she would sink. In the darkness he must have got so far away that he would think she had gone down. He would be anxious, you understand, to get his crew and passengers to land."

"Of course. I give him credit for being fairly sane," she said.

"On the other hand, who would have any suspicion that the ship would not sink save those who had brought about the panic?"

"The Germans!" exclaimed the girl.

"Exactly. I believe," said Dowd quietly, "that here come the men who caused the explosion in

the fire room and opened the seacocks. They purpose to take charge of the *Admiral Pekhard,* of course. If they get aboard we shall be at their mercy."

"Oh, can we stop them? Can we hold them off?" murmured Ruth.

"I do not know. I am not sure that it would be wise to offer fight. You see, we shall finally be at their mercy."

"If we can't beat them off!" Ruth exclaimed. "Haven't you arms aboard?"

"My dear young lady——"

"Oh, don't think of me!" Ruth cried. "Do just what you would do if I were not here. Wouldn't you and the radio man fight them?"

"I think we could put up a pretty good fight," admitted Dowd thoughtfully. "There are automatic pistols."

"Bring one for me," commanded Ruth. "I can shoot a pistol. Three of us might hold off a small boarding party, I should think."

"If they mean us harm," added Dowd.

"Make them lie off there and wait till morning so that we can see what they look like," begged Ruth.

"That might be attempted."

His lack of certainty rankled in the girl's quick mind. She ejaculated:

"Surely we can try, Mr. Dowd! There is an-

other thing: the deck guns! Had you thought of them?"

"My goodness, no!" admitted the first officer.

"If we could slue around one of those guns, a single shot might sink the boat off there. If they are enemies, I mean."

"Now you have suggested something, Miss Fielding! Wait! Let me have your torch. I will take a look at the guns."

He ran along the deck to the forward gun. After a minute there he ran back to the stern, but kept to the runway on the opposite side of the deck as he passed the girl of the Red Mill. She waited in great impatience for his return.

And when he came she saw that something was decidedly wrong. He wagged his head despairingly.

"No use," he said. "Those fellows were sharper than one would think. The breech-block of each gun is missing."

"That light is drawing close, Mr. Dowd!" Ruth exclaimed. "Get the pistols you spoke of—do!"

But first Dowd called to the radio man up above them: "Hi, Sparks, see that boat coming?"

"What boat?" demanded the other, stopping his work for the moment. Then he saw the light. "Holy heavens! what's that?"

"One of the boats coming back—and not with friends," said Dowd.

"Let me get these wires welded and I'll show 'em!" rejoined Rollife. "I'll send a call——"

At the moment the sudden explosion of a motor engine exhaust startled them. It was no rowboat advancing toward the *Admiral Pekhard.* Probably its crew had been rowing quietly so as not to startle those left aboard the ship.

"The pistols, Mr. Dowd!" begged Ruth again.

The first officer departed on a run. Rollife kept at his work with a running commentary of his opinion of the scoundrels who were approaching. Suddenly a rifle rang out from the coming launch.

"Ahoy! Ahoy the steamer!" shouted a voice. "We see your light, and we'll shoot at it if you don't douse it. Quick, now!"

Another rifle bullet whistled over the head of the radio man. Ruth removed her thumb from the electric torch switch instantly. But Rollife refused at first to be driven.

The next moment, however, a bullet crashed into the lantern on the roof of the radio house. The flame was snuffed out and the radio man was feign to slide down from his exposed position.

Dowd came running from the cabin with the pistols. He gave one to Ruth and another to Rollife. The latter stepped out from the shelter of the house and drew bead on the lamp in the approaching launch. Ruth heard the chatter of

the weapon's hammer—but not a shot was fired!

"Great guns, Dowd!" shouted the radio man, exasperated. "This gat isn't loaded."

"Neither is mine!" exclaimed Ruth, who had made a quick examination in the darkness.

"Oh, my soul!" groaned the first officer. "I got the wrong weapons!"

"And no more clips of cartridges? Well, you——"

There was no use finishing his opinion of Dowd's uselessness. The motor boat shot alongside under increased speed. There was a slanting bump, a grappling iron flew over the rail and caught, and the next moment a man swarmed up the rope, threw his leg over the rail, and then his head and face appeared.

Ruth in her excitement pressed the switch of her electric torch. The ray of light shot almost directly into the eyes of the first boarder. He was the flaxen-haired man—the man she believed she had seen hiding in the small motor boat before the explosion in the steamer's fire room.

CHAPTER XVIII

THE CONSPIRACY LAID BARE

It was too late then for Mr. Dowd to correct his mistake. In the dark he had gone to the wrong closet in the captain's chart room. There were loaded small arms of several kinds in one closet, while in the other were stored spare arms that were not oiled and loaded and ready for use.

The flaxen-haired man swarmed over the rail. He had a pistol in his hand. A moment later another man came up the ladder that had been put over the rail when the captain's launch was manned for departure. This second man bore a powerful electric lamp.

"Drop that torch and your guns!" he commanded sharply. "Put up your hands!"

"It's Dykman!" muttered Mr. Dowd. "The cut-throat villain!"

But he obeyed the command. So did Rollife. And could Ruth Fielding do otherwise? They stood in line with their hands in the air, palms

outward. Dykman crossed the deck with his lamp warily, while the flaxen-haired man held the three under the muzzle of his pistol.

"What do you mean by such actions, Dykman?" demanded Dowd angrily.

"I'll let you guess that, old man," said the other. "But I advise you to do your guessing to yourself. We are in no mood to listen to you."

Then he shot a question at the radio man: "Did you get those wires fixed?"

"Hanged if I don't wish I hadn't touched 'em," growled the radio man.

"You've sent no message, then?"

Rollife shook his head.

"All right. Krueger!" shouted Dykman, who seemed to be in command of the traitors.

"I thought so!" muttered Rollife. "That squarehead never did look right to me."

Several other men as well as Krueger came up the ladder. Their dress proclaimed them seamen or stokers. Ruth wondered if Miss Lentz was with them.

She began to feel fearful for herself. What would these rough men do, now they had possession of the ship? And what would they do to her? That was the principal query in her mind. Dykman merely patted the pockets of Dowd and Rollife to make sure they had no other arms. He gave Ruth slight attention at the moment.

"I'll have to lock you fellows in a stateroom," Dykman said coolly. "Can't have you fooling around the ship. You'll both be taken home in time and held as war prisoners."

"By 'home' I suppose you mean Germany!" snorted Rollife.

"That is exactly what I mean."

"But man!" exclaimed Dowd, "you don't expect to get this ship through the blockade? And you've got to repair the damage your explosion did, too."

"Don't worry," grinned Dykman. "She's not damaged much. We opened seacocks——"

"Oh, yes, I found that out," admitted Dowd. "And I closed them."

"Thanks," said the other coolly. "So much trouble saved us. We'll get to work at the pumps. We ought to be clear of the water by morning. Only one boiler is injured. We can hobble along with the use of the other boilers, I think."

"Man, but you have the brass!" exclaimed Dowd. "Some of these destroyers will catch you, sure."

"We'll see about that," grumbled Dykman. "We'll put you two men where you will be able to do no harm, at least."

"And Miss Fielding?" questioned Dowd quickly. "You will see that she comes to no harm, Mr. Dykman?"

"She is rather an awkward prisoner, consider-

ing the use we intend to make of the *Admiral Pekhard*. Women will be much in the way, I assure you."

"But there is Miss Lentz," murmured Ruth.

"Miss Lentz? She is not here. She went in the captain's boat," the sub-officer said shortly. "I wish you had gone with her."

"It was your fault I did not," said Ruth boldly.

"Perhaps," admitted the German. "But necessity knows no law, Miss Fielding. It was said you knew too much—or suspected too much. I dislike making a military prisoner of a woman. But, as I said before, necessity knows no law. You and Dowd and Rollife had to be separated from Captain Hastings and the rest of them. There are only a few of us—at present," he added.

"And how the deuce do you expect to augment your crew?" demanded the chief officer. "You can't work this ship with so few hands. And you've got none of the engineer's crew."

"I am something of an engineer myself, Mr. Dowd," returned the other, smiling with a satisfied air. "We shall have proper assistance before long." He hailed Krueger, who had climbed to the roof of the radio house. "Is everything all right?"

"Will be shortly, Mr. Boldig," said the assistant radio man.

Ruth started. Then "Dykman" was "Boldig," whose name she had formerly heard mentioned between Irma Lentz and the flaxen-haired man. The man with two names turned upon Ruth.

"You had better go immediately to your own room, Miss Fielding," he said respectfully. "I shall be obliged to lock you in, as I shall Mr. Dowd and Rollife here. I assure you all," he added significantly, "that it is much against my will that you remain prisoners. I would much rather you had all three gone with the captain.

"By the way, Dowd, Captain Hastings was told you were in command of this small motor launch. I am afraid you will have much to explain, later. And you, too, Rollife."

Rollife only growled in reply and Dowd said nothing. When they started aft with Boldig, Ruth followed. She knew it was useless to object to any plan the German might have in mind.

Before they left the deck she heard the spark sputtering at the top of the radio mast. Krueger was at the instrument, and without doubt he was sending a call to friends somewhere on the ocean. It would be no S O S for help in the Continental code, but in a German code, she was sure.

The jar and thump of the pumps already resounded through the ship. By the light of Boldig's electric lamp they went below to the cabin. Ruth again produced her own torch and found

her way to her stateroom, while Dowd and Rollife went the other way.

Alone once again, the girl of the Red Mill gave her mind up to a thorough and searching examination of the situation, and especially her own position.

She was the single woman with and in the power of a gang of men who were not only desperate, but who were of a race whose treatment of women prisoners had filled the whole civilized world with scorn and loathing. Ruth wished heartily that Irma Lentz had come back with the motor boat. She would have felt safer if Miss Lentz had been of the party.

Ruth realized that neither Dowd or Rollife could come to her help if she had need of them. They would be locked in their rooms at so great a distance from hers that they could not even hear her if she screamed!

One thing she might do. She hastily secured the key that was in the outside of the stateroom lock and locked the door from the inside. Scarcely had she done this when Boldig came along the corridor. He rapped on her door; then coolly tried the knob.

"Unlock the door and give me the key, Miss Fielding," he commanded. "I will lock you in from outside and carry the key myself. Nobody will disturb you."

"No, Mr. Boldig. I shall feel safer if I keep the key," said Ruth firmly.

"Come, now! No foolishness!" he said angrily. "Do as you are told."

"No. I shall keep the key," she repeated.

"Why, you—well," and he laughed shortly, "I will make sure that you stay in there, my lady."

He went hastily away. Ruth waited in some trepidation. She did not know what would next happen. She wished heartily that she had a loaded weapon. She certainly would have used it had need arisen.

Soon Boldig was back, and he proceeded without another word to her to nail fast the stateroom door as he had nailed the radio room door. When this was completed to his satisfaction, he said bitterly:

"If we feed you at all, Miss Fielding, it will have to be through the port. *Au revoir!*"

It was with vast relief that Ruth heard him depart. The thought of food—or the lack of it—did not at present trouble her mind.

The steady thump and rattle of the pumps by which the fireroom was being cleared of water continued to sound in her ears. She laid aside her coat and hat, for the night was warm. She flashed the pocket lamp upon the face of her traveling clock. It was already nearly midnight.

The thought of sleep was repugnant to her.

How could she close her eyes when she did not know what the morning might bring forth? It was not wholly that she feared personal harm. Not that so much. But there was, she felt, a conspiracy on foot that might do much harm to the Allied cause.

These Germans had played a shrewd game to get possession of the *Admiral Pekhard.* It was not for the purpose of sinking the transport ship that they had brought about her abandonment. No, indeed!

As Boldig—the erstwhile "Dykman"—had intimated, nothing like destroying the steamship was the intention of the plotters. The rascals had been very careful not to injure seriously the engines or any other part of the ship's mechanism.

With the fireroom suddenly filling with water after the explosion, the dampened fires caused such a volume of steam that it was no wonder the engineer and his force were driven from their stations. As long as the panic-stricken passengers and terrified crew remained aboard the *Admiral Pekhard,* undoubtedly it appeared that a hole had been blown through the outer skin of the ship and that she was on the verge of sinking.

Had Mr. Dowd been on deck and in possession of his senses, Ruth was quite sure that the panic would have been stayed. Captain Hastings was not a big enough man to handle such a situa-

tion as the German plotters had brought about. He lost his head completely, although he doubtless had remained on the ship's deck until every other soul (as he supposed) was in the small boats.

The very character of the pompous little skipper had made the success of the Hun plot possible. All that was passed now, however. Nothing could be done to avert the successful termination of the conspiracy. Or so it seemed to the girl of the Red Mill, sitting alone and in the darkness of her small stateroom.

After a time she rose and pushed back the blind at her port. She opened the thick, oval glass window, which was pivoted. She saw the phosphorescent waves slowly marching past the rolling steamship.

Suddenly she heard voices. They were of two men talking near the rail and near her window as well. One was Boldig. He said in German:

"You have shown yourself to be a good deal of a coward, Guelph. Always fearful of disaster! Look you: If you *will* that nothing shall balk us, no disaster will arrive. It is the *will* of the German people that will make them in the end the victors in this war. Remember that, Guelph."

The other muttered something about taking unnecessary chances. Boldig at once declared:

"No chances. Krueger will pick up the U-714. Have no fear. She is one of the newest type of cruiser-submarines. She carries the crew arranged to man this *Admiral Pekhard.* Ha, we will make the Englanders gnash their teeth in rage!"

"We shall hope so," said the other man. Ruth thought it must be the flaxen-haired fellow; but of this she could not be sure.

"This will be one of our greatest coups," went on Boldig. "The cargo awaits us in a friendly port—you know where. We will sail from thence to carry supplies to the submarines that will be sent from time to time from the Belgian bases. She shall be a 'mother ship' indeed, and, lurking out of the lanes of travel, will make long submarine voyages possible.

"Ah, we will do much with this old tub of a steamer to increase the despair of the enemy. Rejoice, Guelph! We shall receive honor and much gold for this."

"Huh!" growled the other, "gold is good, I grant you."

CHAPTER XIX

TOM CAMERON TAKES A HAND

ASIDE from the two men he had seen shot down upon the after deck of the Zeppelin, Tom Cameron soon made out that the airplane attack upon the larger airship must have done other damage. He was glad if this was so. The regrettable fact that he had killed two men would be offset, in his mind, if the bullets of the machine gun had made difficult the sailing of the Zeppelin to London.

He had seen the chipped and dented rail and deck across which the hail of machine-gun bullets had swept. He hoped that there had been done some injury of greater moment than these marks betrayed. And he believed that there was such injury.

If not, why was the Zeppelin limping along the airways so slowly through the fog? The commander of the great machine had been called to the forward deck, and that not merely for the conning of the ship on its course, Tom was sure.

Suppose he had been the means, after all, of crippling the Zeppelin?

The thought filled the young American's heart with delight. Much as he was depressed by the death of Ralph Stillinger, the American ace, Tom could not fail to be overjoyed at the thought of setting the Zeppelin back in this attempt to reach England.

The Germans might have to return to their base for repairs. Of course, Tom was a prisoner, and there was not a chance of his getting away; still, he could feel delight because of this possibility that roweled his mind.

He tried to peer through the thick glass of the window in the forward closet of the Zeppelin cabin. Mistily he saw the hairy-coated Germans moving about on the forward deck. He could not recognize the *ober-leutnant* who seemed to be in command of the ship; but he saw that several of the men were at work repairing some of the wire stays that had been broken.

As the fog partially cleared for a moment, he was enabled to make out a box of a house far forward on this first deck. It was probably where the steering gear was located. Just where the motors and engines were boxed he did not know. A fellow in that pilot-house—if such it was—might do something of moment, he told himself. If he could once get there, Tom Cameron thought,

he would make it impossible for the Zeppelin ever to reach England, unless it drifted there by accident.

It was a rather dispiriting situation, however, to be locked in this narrow closet. He had already tried the door and found that it was secure. Besides, anybody on the deck, by coming close to the window, could look in and see if he was still imprisoned.

An hour passed, then another. The Zeppelin's speed was not increased, nor did he see the commander in all the time.

He believed the airship must have drifted out over the sea.

Although the cabin arrangements on the Zeppelin made the place where Tom Cameron was confined almost soundproof, the jar and rumble of the ship's powerful motors were audible. Now there grew upon his hearing another sound. It was a note deeper than that of the motors, and of an organ-like timber. A continuous current of noise, rather pleasant than otherwise, was this new sound. He could not at first understand what it meant.

The fog was still thick about the airship. He believed they had descended several thousand feet. It was now close to mid-forenoon, and as a usual thing the fog would have disappeared by this hour over the land.

It must be that the Zeppelin had reached the sea. Whatever material injury she had suffered, the commander had by no means given up his intention of following out his orders to reach the English coast.

It was at this point in his ruminations that Tom suddenly became possessed of a new idea—an explanation of the organ-like sound he heard. It was the surf on the coast! The ship must be drifting over the French coastline, and the sound of the surf breaking on the rocks was the sound he heard.

Tom possessed a good memory, and he had not been studying maps of the Western Front daily for nothing. He knew, very well indeed, the country over which he had flown with poor Ralph Stillinger.

He had located to a nicety the spot where they mounted into the fog-cloud to escape the German pursuit-planes. Then had come the discovery of the Zeppelin beneath, and the catastrophe that had followed.

The Zeppelin had been sailing seaward, and was near the coast at the time Tom had so thrillingly boarded it; and he was sure that if it had changed its course, this change had been to the southwestward. It was following the French coast, rather than drifting over Belgium.

These ruminations were scarcely to the point,

however; Tom desired to do something, not to remain inactive.

But the time did not seem propitious. He dared not attempt breaking out of his prison. And although he still had his automatic pistol, he would be foolish to try to fight this whole German crew.

He was startled from his reverie by the unlocking of the door and the odor of warm food. Nor was it "bully beef" or beans, the two staples that gladden the hearts of the American soldier.

A meek-looking German private entered with a steaming toureen of ragout, or stew, a plate of dark bread, and a mug of hot drink. He bowed to Tom very ceremoniously and placed the tray on the couch.

"Der gomblements of der commander," he said, gutturally, and backed out of the narrow doorway.

"He's all right, your commander!" exclaimed Tom impulsively, making for the fare with all the zest of good appetite.

The German grinned, and faded out. He closed the door softly. Tom had already dipped into the stew and found it excellent (and of rabbit) before it crossed his mind that he had not heard the key click in the lock of the door.

He stopped eating to listen. He heard nothing from the outer cabin.

"But that grinning, simple-looking Heinie may not be as foolish as he appears. The fellow may have left the door unlocked to trap me," Tom muttered.

He continued to eat the plentiful meal furnished him, while he tried to think the situation out to a reasonable conclusion. Had the German forgotten to lock the door? Or was it a scheme to trap him? It already mystified Tom why he had not been deprived of his pistol. He could not understand such carelessness. Was the commander of the Zeppelin so confident that he was both harmless and helpless?

He remembered that when he was first seized, upon leaping aboard the aircraft, his captors had shown a strong desire to throw him off the ship. The commander's opportune arrival had undoubtedly saved him.

And here they were feeding him, and treating him very nicely indeed! It puzzled Tom, if it did not actually breed suspicion in his mind.

"But then you can't trust these Huns," he told himself. "Maybe that chap is out there now waiting to shoot me if I try to slip out of this little office."

He was not contented to let this question remain in the air. Tom was of that type of young American who dares. He was ready to take a chance.

Besides, he had in his heart that desire, already set forth, to do something to halt the Zeppelin raid over London. And he was serious in this belief that it was possible for him to do something for the Allied cause in memory of the brave American ace who had been killed almost at his side.

When he had finished the meal he glanced forward through the narrow window. At the moment there was nobody in sight on the forward deck. Tom slid along the couch to the door. He put a tentative hand on the knob.

CHAPTER XX

THE STORM BREAKS

He turned the knob very slowly with his left hand. As Tom sat upon the end of the couch he would be behind the door when he opened it. The weapon the commander of the Zeppelin had neglected to take from him was in his right hand, and ready for use.

He gently drew the door toward him. As he had supposed, it was not locked. When it was ajar he waited for what might follow.

Then, through the aperture at the back of the door, he had a view of the narrow cabin to its very end. Sufficient light entered through the several windows of clouded glass to show him that there was nobody in sight. Not even the private who had brought his lunch had lingered here.

Rising swiftly and with the pistol ready in his hand, the young American stepped out of the closet in which he had been confined. There was a small German clock screwed to the wall. It was now almost noon.

Crouching, ready to leap or run as the case might need, Tom approached the other end of the cabin. There he could see through the dim pane of the door, gaining a view of the after-deck.

The mystery of the absence of all life forward was instantly explained. More than a dozen of the crew and officers were gathered on the after-deck. They stood in a row along the deck, their heads bared, while the *ober-leutnant* read from a book.

Tom realized almost at once what the scene meant, and he shrank back from the door. The crew could not hear, of course, the words the officer pronounced; but they were all probably familiar with the service for the dead in the Prayer Book.

Somehow the ceremony affected Tom Cameron strongly. At the feet of the row of men were laid two bodies lashed in a covering, or shroud. They were the men mowed down by the machine gun which Tom himself had manipulated from the American airplane.

The Germans are sentimentalists, it must be confessed. They would take time on their way to raid an enemy city from the air in a most cowardly fashion, to read the burial service over their comrades.

For the airship was over the sea now, and, as

though from the deck of a sailing ship, the dead bodies could be slid into the water. But the height from which they would fall was much greater than on any ocean vessel.

The book was closed. Two bearers at the head and two at the feet of each corpse raised them on narrow stretchers, the foot-ends of which were rested upon the rail. A gesture from the officer, and the stretchers were tipped. The bodies slid quietly over the rail and disappeared.

The officer put the Prayer Book in his pocket and adjusted his helmet and goggles. The men with him followed suit. He dismissed them, and almost at once the throbbing of the motors was increased.

Tom Cameron ran back to the closet and shut himself in. He felt sure the commander would come through the cabin to the forward deck. However, the German did not try the knob of the closet door.

Tom saw him pass along the deck to the pilot house, facing the stiff gale. His garments blew about him furiously, and it seemed that the wind had suddenly increased in violence.

The course of the airship was changed. Tom knew that, for the next time a German passed along the deck he saw that his coat-tails flapped sideways. The Zeppelin was being steered across the course of the gale.

If he could only get to the steering gear and do something to it—wreck it in some way, at least, put it out of commission for a while. What would happen to him did not matter. Tom Cameron had been taking chances for some time.

He could feel the Zeppelin stagger under the beating of the fierce gale. There was a black cloud just ahead of the flying craft. Suddenly this cloud was striped again and again with yellow lightning.

Then how it did rain! The downpour slanted across the airship, beating in waves, like those of a troubled sea, against the cabin framework. Tom felt the whole structure rock and tremble.

He felt that the ship was rising. The commander purposed to get above this electric storm. Again and again the lightning flashed. It ran along the wires, limning each stay luridly.

In addition Tom began to feel the creeping cold of the higher atmosphere searching through his clothing. He buttoned his leather coat and looked about for something of additional warmth. The cold was seeping right into the closet around the window frame.

Then it was that Tom found the blanket. He lifted the cushion on the bench by chance, and there it was, neatly folded. This closet must be used at times for a sleeping place.

He could barely see what he was about, for it

had grown black outside. Only the recurrent flashes of lightning illuminated the scene. And that scene, when he stared through the window, was wild indeed.

Tom put on his helmet and the goggles fastened thereto and wrapped himself in the blanket. He lay down with his head close to the window. Slowly the Zeppelin was rising above the tempest. By and by the last whisps of the storm-cloud disappeared; but the gale still thundered through the wire stays of the ship and buffeted the great envelope above the swinging cabin and bridges.

"Such a craft might be easily torn to pieces by the wind!" The thought was not cheering, and Tom put it aside as he did all other depressing ideas.

It seemed to him that he had already gone through so much that his life was charmed. At least, he never felt less fear than he did at the present time.

The sharp gale continued. The Zeppelin had risen much higher, but it could not get above the wind-storm. Although it may have been steering to a nicety, he was sure that the huge craft was drifting off her course to a considerable degree.

After a couple of hours the commander of the Zeppelin came back from the pilot-house. He saw Tom's face pressed close to the window and waved his hand.

When he entered the cabin Tom slipped back to the door and opened it a narrow crack. The *ober-leutnant* went right through the cabin and disappeared.

Was the time ripe for Tom to carry out the scheme which had been slowly forming in his mind? Was the moment propitious?

The young American hesitated. It meant peril —perhaps death—for him, whether he succeeded or failed. He knew that well enough. Such an attempt as he purposed might only be bred of desperation.

He tore off the helmet and goggles which had masked him. He rolled the blanket and laid it along the bench as his own body had lain. On to the end of the roll next the window he pulled the helmet and arranged the goggles so that a glance through the window would show a man lying apparently asleep on the cushioned bench.

Then he tied a handkerchief of khaki color over his head and prepared to steal out of the closet, his pistol in his hand.

CHAPTER XXI

THE WRECK

YOUTH is fain to be reckless, but there was no lack of reasoning behind Tom Cameron's intention.

He was a prisoner on this airship which was bound on a raid over London. If the Zeppelin was not brought down and wrecked on English soil, she would return to her base and Tom would be sent to a German internment camp for the duration of the war.

Imprisonment by the Hun was not a desirable fate to contemplate. If the Zeppelin was brought down during the raid over London, he would very likely be killed in its fall. He might as well risk death now, and perhaps in doing so deliver a stroke that would make this raid impossible.

He slipped out of the closet in which he had been confined and closed the door behind him. He ran quickly to the after door of the long cabin, which he had previously seen could be fastened upon the inside by a bolt. He shot this bolt, and

then ran forward again and opened the door to the deck.

The wind almost took his breath. He was obliged to force the door shut again with his shoulder, and stood panting to recover himself. There was some considerable risk in facing the gale outside there.

It was impressed upon his mind more clearly now what it would mean if the Zeppelin could no longer be steered. This gale would sweep the airship down the English Channel and directly out into the Atlantic!

As this thought smoldered in his mind, others took fire from it. He faced a desperate venture.

If he carried through his purpose, with the Germans manning this airship he would be swept to a lingering but almost certain death.

The airship could not keep afloat for many hours. It took a deal of petrol to drive the huge machine from its base to England and back again. The store of fuel must be exhausted in a comparatively short time, and the Zeppelin would slowly settle to the surface of the sea.

Under these conditions he was pretty sure to be drowned, even if the Germans did not kill him immediately. He thought of his sister Helen—of his father—of Ruth Fielding. Already, perhaps, the loss of Ralph Stillinger and the airplane was known behind the French and British

lines. Helen must learn of the catastrophe in time. Ruth might hear of the wreck of the airplane before she sailed for home.

Thought of the girl of the Red Mill well nigh unmanned Tom Cameron for a moment. To attempt to carry through the scheme he had plotted in his mind was, very likely, hastening his own death. Had he a right to do this?

It was a hard question to decide. Personal fear did not enter into the matter at all. The question was whether he owed his first duty to his family and Ruth or to the cause which he and every other right-thinking American had subscribed to when the United States got into this World War.

That was the point! Tom Cameron sighed, shrugged his shoulders, and again opened the door which gave egress to the forward deck of the German airship.

He pulled the door shut and breasted the cutting wind that rocked the airship as though she were in a heavy sea. He scrambled somehow along the deck to the pilot-house. There was a square of the same clouded glass in the door of this room. Through it he saw the shadow of a man with a row of instruments before him as well as several levers under his hand.

Tom had very little idea regarding the exact use of either the levers or the instruments. But he knew that he could put the Zeppelin out of com-

mission with a few smashing blows if once he could get this man out of the way.

This whole forward part of the ship seemed deserted save for the man inside the room. Of course, the helmsman, or whatever he was called, must be in communication with all other parts of the great aircraft. If Tom would put his determination into practice he must overcome this man —and that quickly.

He opened the door. The man was aware of his presence, for the roar of the wind and the throbbing of the motors immediately reached the German's ears more acutely. Tom saw him turn his head to look over his shoulder.

The young American had gripped his pistol by the barrel. He raised it and with all his force brought the weapon's butt down on the padded helmet the man wore. Again and again he struck, while the fellow wheeled about and tried to grapple with him.

Tom broke the German's goggles and the face before him was at once bathed in blood. Again and again he struck. The man sunk to his knees —then supinely to the deck, lying across the threshold of the room.

The American strode over him and looked swiftly about the hut. In a corner was fastened an iron bar. He seized it, and with repeated blows smashed the clock-faces and more delicate

instruments, as well as beating the levers into a twisted wreck.

The Zeppelin lurched sideways, rolled, and then righted itself. But it lost headway and Tom felt sure that it would drift now at the mercy of the furious gale. He had accomplished his purpose.

But he had the result of his act to face. The other members of the crew of the Zeppelin would be warned of the catastrophe almost immediately. They would soon break through the door of the cabin and reach the forward deck.

He stepped out of the wrecked hut and glanced back. Already the roar of the motors was subsiding. He surely had put the whole works out of commission.

Tom scrambled around the pilot-house into the extreme bow of the craft. Here was a waist-high bin, or storage box, with a hinged cover. He opened it and looked in. It seemed roomy, and there were only some cans and boxes in the receptacle. In a flash he jumped in, lowered the cover, and crouched there in the darkness.

What went on after that he could neither see nor hear. But he could feel the pitching and rolling of the damaged Zeppelin! He knew, too, by that peculiar sinking feeling at the pit of the stomach that attends such a swift passage downward, that the ship was rapidly falling.

This lasted only for a few moments. Then the airship found a steadier keel. It had not begun to spin as a biplane or a monoplane would have done. In some way her descent had been stopped and her balance recovered. But her motors had stopped entirely, and that meant that the wind was driving her as it pleased.

With the cessation of the motors his ear became tuned to other sounds—the shrieking of the wind through the stays and the thumping of its blasts upon the elephant-like envelope. Nor was the passage the craft made a smooth one.

Now and again it pitched as though about to dive into the sea. This sea was roaring, too—a monotone of sound that could not be mistaken. The aircraft was at the mercy of the elements.

He crouched in the box, quite ready to spring up and empty his pistol into the faces of any of his enemies who lifted the cover. But for some reason they did not track him here.

It could not be possible that they were long mystified as to who had done the deed. The figure he had laid upon the bench in the little room at the end of the closet would not have long led them astray. He had brought about the disaster and the thought of it delighted him.

No matter what finally became of him, he had stopped this Zeppelin from ever reaching the English shore! There was one cruel raid over Lon-

don halted in the very beginning. He could have shouted aloud in his delight.

He thrust up the heavy cover of the box and cocked his ear to listen for near-by sounds. There was considerable hammering and boisterous talk going on, the sound of which he caught from moment to moment. But it was mostly smothered in the roar of the waves and the shrieking of the wind.

They were very near the surface of the boisterous sea. He heard the bursting of a wave below the airship and the spray of it, tossed high in the air, swept across the structure and showered him as he crouched under the open box lid. In a minute or two now, the Zeppelin would be a hopeless wreck.

It came, indeed, more quickly than he had apprehended. There was a sudden dip, and the craft was swerved half around with a mighty wrench of parting stays and superstructure. A wave dashed completely over the platform. He shut the cover of the box to keep out the water.

The next few minutes were indeed disastrous ones. He was in a sorry situation. He did not know what was happening to the other castaways, but he felt and heard the frame of the great airship being wrenched to pieces by the ravenous sea.

The envelope boomed and tore at the frame for

freedom. At last it must have been wrenched free by the wind, and the sound of its booming and clashing gradually drifted away. The box he was in rocked and pitched like a small boat in the sea. He ventured to look out again, clearing his eyes of the salt spray.

It was already evening. There was a lurid light upon the tossing waves. Near him was a mass of twisted framework and a barge-like hulk that rode high. Upon it he saw clinging several wind-swept figures.

Then the sea tore the bow of the forward deck of the Zeppelin entirely free from the rest of the structure. Tom Cameron went drifting off to leeward in his uncertain refuge.

The tumbling sea separated him from the Germans. Perhaps it was as well.

As his raft rose upon a wave he looked back into the deep trough and saw the remains of the airship turning slowly, around and around, as though being drawn down into the vortex of a whirlpool. His lighter craft shot downward into the next valley, and that was the last glimpse Tom had of the wrecked Zeppelin and its crew.

CHAPTER XXII

ADRIFT

RUTH FIELDING did not close her eyes all that trying night. Morning found her as wakeful in her stateroom as when she had been nailed into it by Boldig, the leader of the German mutineers.

The situation of the *Admiral Pekhard* was not difficult; and although she was without steerageway she was in no danger. There was a heavy swell on from a storm that had passed somewhere to the northward; but the night remained quite calm, if dark.

The thumping of the pumps continued until dawn. Then the water was evidently cleared from the fireroom, and the men could go to work cleaning the grates and making ready to lay new fires in all but the damaged boiler.

There was much to do about the engine, however, to delay the putting of the ship under steam. The water, rising as high as it had, had seeped into the machinery and must be wiped out and the parts thoroughly oiled.

Thus far the signals by radio had not been answered by the approach of the submarine that Boldig had reason to expect. As Ruth had heard him boast, the big German submarine, No. 714, must be lurking near, awaiting news of the British steamship from Brest.

The Germans had taken a big chance. Of course, the ship and the submersible might not meet at all. Instead, a patrol boat might hail the *Admiral Pekhard,* or catch her wireless calls. The Germans would be in trouble then without doubt.

Of course they had the motor boat in which they had got away from the ship in the first place. They could pile into that and make for some port where they knew they had friends. There were such ports to the south, for Spain was not as successfully neutral as her government would have liked to be. German propaganda was active in that country.

Ruth was not in much fear at present as to her own treatment. The mutineers had their hands full. What would finally happen to her if the Germans carried their plans to fulfilment, was a question she dared not contemplate.

Dowd and Rollife she presumed would be removed to the submarine and taken back to Germany—if the submarine ever reached her base again. But there were no provisions on subma-

rines, she very well knew, for women—prisoners or otherwise.

This uncertainty, although she tried to crowd the thought down, brought her to the verge of despair when she allowed the topic to get possession of her mind. And she despaired of Tom Cameron, as well. What had become of him—if he was the passenger the unfortunate Ralph Stillinger had taken up into the air with him on his last flight?

Had Tom really been killed? Had Helen learned his fate by this time? Ruth wished she was back in Paris with her chum that they might institute a search for Tom Cameron.

Nor was the girl of the Red Mill free from worry regarding those at home. Uncle Jabez's letter, which she had received before leaving the hospital, had filled her heart with forebodings. She had written at once to assure him and Aunt Alvirah that she was returning soon.

But now the time of that return seemed very doubtful indeed. If she was sent to Germany as a prisoner—or kept aboard this steamship which the Germans intended to make into a "mother ship" for U-boats—it might be long months, even years, before she reached home.

Tom had said the war would soon be over; but there was no surety of that. It was only a hope. Ruth might never again see the dear little old

woman whose murmured complaint of, "Oh, my back! and oh, my bones!" had become the familiar quotation of Ruth and her young friends.

Aunt Alvirah was dear to Ruth. The girl desired more strongly than ever before in her life to be with the poor old woman again.

She could no longer hear the snapping of the radio, now that daylight had come. Either Krueger, the assistant and traitorous radio operator, had managed to communicate with the commander of the German U-boat 714, or further effort to this end was considered useless now. Another attempt might be made again when night came. Ruth knew it to be a fact that the German submersibles seldom rose to the surface of the sea and put up their radio masts except at night.

It was during the dark hours that those sharks of the sea received orders from Nauen, the great German radio station, and communicated with each other, as well and with such supply ships as might be working in conjunction with the submarines.

If these mutineers were successful in carrying out their plan, and made a junction with the U-boat that carried a crew to supplement those Germans already aboard the *Admiral Pekhard,* the enemy might succeed in putting into commission a craft that would greatly aid in the submarine warfare.

Thus far it had been so daringly conceived and well carried through that the conspiracy promised to rise to one of the very greatest German intrigues of the war. Its final success, however, rested on time and place. The submarine and the stolen steamer must come together soon, or the latter would surely run across one of the innumerable patrol ships with which the Allies were scouring this part of the Atlantic.

It was noon before the beat of the *Admiral Pekhard's* propellers announced that she was again under control. The rolling motion that had finally become nauseating to even as good a sailor as Ruth, was now overcome. The ship plowed through the sea steadily, if slowly.

Occasionally the girl heard a footstep pass her stateroom window; but she kept the port nearly closed so that nobody could peer in. Some time after the screw had started a man came and knocked on the pane.

She smelled coffee and heard the rattle of dishes; so she opened the window.

The man thrust in to her a pot of coffee and a platter of ham and eggs—coarse fare, but welcome, for Ruth found she had a robust appetite. She placed a piece of silver in the man's palm and heard a muttered "Thank you!" in German.

She felt that it might be well to make a friend among the mutineers if she could do so.

It was not long after she was fed that another footstep halted at her open port. The voice of Boldig, the recreant officer of the ship came to her ear.

"Do you want anything, Miss Fielding?" he asked.

At first she would not speak; but when he repeated his question, adding:

"You know, I can draw those nails in your door as well as I could hammer them in," she hastened to reply:

"I want nothing."

He laughed most disagreeably. "You might as well be good natured about it, my dear," he said. "No knowing how long we shall be shipmates. I am quite sure the commander of the submersible will not take *you* aboard his craft; so I fear you are apt to remain with us."

She said nothing. The threat was only what she had feared. What could she do or say? She was adrift on a sea of circumstances more terrifying than the ocean itself.

Boldig went away laughing; she threw herself upon her berth, trembling and weeping. All her spirit was broken now; she could not control the fears that possessed her.

CHAPTER XXIII

AT THE MOMENT OF NEED

THE bravest and most cheerful person will come after a time to a point where he or she can bear no more with high courage. Nerves and will had both given way in Ruth Fielding's case. For an hour or more she was merely a very ill, very much frightened young woman.

The injury she had suffered when the Clair hospital was bombed—that injury which still troubled her physically—had naturally helped undermine her wonderful courage and self-possession. The news from Charlie Bragg of Tom Cameron's possible disaster had likewise shaken her. What had happened aboard this steamship during the past twenty-four hours had completed her undoing.

Ruth Fielding had an unwavering trust in a Higher Power that guides and guards; but she was no supine believer in what one preacher of a robust doctrine has termed "leaving and loafing." She considered it eminently fit, while leaving re-

sults with the Almighty, to do all that she could to bring things out right herself.

Therefore she did not wholly give way to either aches or pains or to the feeling of helplessness that had come over her. Not for long did she lose courage.

She got off her bed, closed the window, and proceeded to make a fresh toilet. Meanwhile she considered how she might barricade her door if Boldig removed the nails and attempted to enter the stateroom against her will. Of course, the lock could easily be smashed.

She finally saw how she might move the bed between the door and the washstand, so that the latter would brace the bed in such a way that the door could not be forced inward. She could sleep in the bed in that position, and she decided to take this precaution.

That was in case Boldig removed the spikes holding fast her door. Now that she had considered the matter from every side, she was not sure but she desired to have the German officer release her—no matter what his reason might be for so doing.

She must, however, gain something else first. Her wit must win what her physical force might not. She bided her time till evening.

Again the man came to her window with food. It proved to be another platter of ham and

eggs, flanked this time with a pot of wretched tea.

"Goodness!" exclaimed Ruth, "is ham and eggs all you know how to cook? I shall be squealing, or clucking pretty soon. Is there nothing else to eat aboard?"

"Ain't no cook, Miss," the man said. "We're all so busy, anyway, that we just have to get what we can quickly. I'm sorry," for she had dropped another half-dollar into his palm.

"Is there nobody to cook for you hard-working men?" repeated Ruth briskly. "How many of you are there?"

"Eleven, Miss, counting Mr. Boldig."

"Why, that's not so many. And you feed Mr. Dowd and Mr. Rollife, of course?"

"They haven't had as much as you, Miss. Mr. Boldig said they could stand a little fasting, anyway. We haven't had any decent grub ourselves."

"I could cook for you!" Ruth cried eagerly. "I'll do it, too, if you men want me to. I'd rather do that than be shut up here all the time. And —then—I'd like a change from ham and eggs," and she laughed.

"Yes, ma'am. I s'pected you would. But I don't see——"

"You tell the other men what I say—that I would cook for you all if I were let out of here.

But I must be guaranteed that you will not harm me if I do this."

"Who'd want to harm you, Miss?" returned the man, with some sharpness.

"I don't know that anybody would. I am sure if I worked for you, and cooked for you, you would not see any of your mates hurt me?"

"No, indeed, Miss," said the fellow warmly. "Nor anybody else. I'll tell the other boys. And I'll speak to Mr. Boldig——"

"Send him here," interrupted Ruth quickly. "Tell him I want to speak to him. But you speak to your mates and tell them what I am willing to do. If I cook for you I want 'safe conduct.' "

"Of course, ma'am. Nobody shall hurt you. And I'll tell Mr. Boldig to come."

Within half an hour she heard Boldig's quick step upon the deck. He barked in at the open window:

"What's this you are up to, Miss Fielding? You'll set my men all by the ears. You are a dangerous character, I believe. What do you mean by telling them you will cook for them if I let you out of your room?"

Ruth thought he was not so angry as he made out to be. She said boldly:

"I am willing to earn the good will of the men in that way, Mr. Boldig. You know why I do it. I shall appeal to them if you undertake to treat

me in any way unbecoming your position as a gentleman and an officer."

"You have a small opinion of me, Miss Fielding!" he exclaimed.

"That is your fault, not mine," she told him coolly. "And I hope you will show me that I am wrong."

He went away without further word, and in a little while she heard somebody drawing the nails from the doorframe.

"Who is that?" she asked before she unlocked the door.

"It's me, ma'am," said the rather drawling voice of the man Boldig called "Fritz."

He did not seem to be a typical German at least. When Ruth opened her door she found the man to be rather a simple-looking fellow. He grinned and touched his forelock.

"I'm to show you where they cook, Miss, and how to find the mess tins and all. There's a good fire in one of the galley ranges. The boys is all your friends, Miss. You needn't be afraid of us."

"I am not at all afraid of you, Fritz," she said, smiling at him. "I count you as my friend aboard here, if nobody else is."

"Sure you can count on me, Miss. You know," he added confidentially, "I ain't a reg'lar German. Not like Mr. Boldig and these other fel-

lers. I was born in Boston, and I'd rather be right there now than over on this side of the pond. But you needn't tell anybody I said so."

"I won't say anything about it," she told him, following him through the passages toward the steward's and cook's quarters. "But why, then, if your heart is not in this business, why did you join in the expedition to take charge of the *Admiral Pekhard?*"

"Their money, Miss," Fritz told her. "There's a heap of money in it. When I finish the voyage, though, I'm going to get back to the States. I'm through with all this then. I'll have money enough to open a shop of my own."

"And do you suppose you will be welcome at home, when people know of your treachery?" asked Ruth indignantly.

"No, Miss. I won't be welcome if they know it. But they won't. I ain't fool enough to tell 'em."

In ten minutes Ruth had learned all that was necessary for her to know about the cooking quarters and the tools she had to work with. There was a good fire, as Fritz had said, and she at once went to work on baking powder biscuit—and she made a heap of them. She knew that thirteen men (counting the two prisoners aft) could eat a lot of bread. In the cold storage room was fresh meat and plenty of bacon and ham. She had to

work alone, for the Germans had all they could do to steer the ship, keep lookout, stoke the fires and run the engines properly. She wondered that they got any sleep at all, and Fritz admitted to her that they were only allowed two hours' relief at a time.

Boldig was a driver; but he was just the sort of man to head such a piratical expedition as this. He worked hard himself, and knew how to get every ounce of work possible out of those under him.

He looked in at Ruth working in the kitchen, and spoke quite nicely to her. Perhaps the great plate of biscuits, pork chops, and French fried potatoes she gave him to take up to the wheelhouse, caused him to consider her wishes to a degree.

Later she insisted that Mr. Dowd and Rollife, the radio man, should have their share. She made one of the men go to Boldig for the keys to their rooms, and she piled a tray high with good things for the prisoners to eat. Boldig would not let her go herself to the men in durance. He would not trust her to talk with them.

She washed her dishes, banked her fire, and laid out what she purposed to cook for breakfast. Then, very tired indeed and with the lame shoulder fairly "jumping," she retired to her stateroom. It was then ten o'clock, and having had no

sleep at all the night before Ruth was desperately tired.

She entered her room, locked the door, and pushed the bed as she had planned between the door and the stationary washstand. Then she went to bed, feeling that she would be safe.

But nobody had to wake her in the morning. The sea had become rough over night, and at the slow pace she was traveling the *Admiral Pekhard* rolled a good deal in the roughening waves.

Ruth awoke with a bright idea in her head, and she proceeded to put it into execution as soon as she got the men's breakfast out of the way. For Boldig and the chief officer and radio man, as well as herself, she had some of Aunt Alvirah's griddle cakes with eggs and bacon. Between two of the cakes she put on one of the plates for the imprisoned men, she slipped a paper on which she had written before leaving her stateroom:

"I am free while I do the cooking. I can get to your rooms if I only had keys to free you. Tell me what to do. R. F."

She had given her word to Boldig to do no harm; but she did not think this was breaking her word. It might be possible for Mr. Dowd, Rollife and herself to get free—even free of the ship. The motor boat was still trailing the steamship,

although if the sea became much rougher she presumed the mutineers would have to find some means of getting the launch inboard.

Half an hour later Boldig came into the galley, his face aflame. He slapped down the piece of paper she had written her note on before Ruth, and glared at her.

"It is impossible to trust a woman!" he growled. "Did you suppose I would let you send food to those fellows without examining it myself? I am not so foolish. Now, my lady, you shall keep on cooking; but your friends aft there can go without anything fancy. I'll take them what I please hereafter."

He turned on his heel and whipped out of the place. Ruth was almost in tears. And they were not inspired by terror, although she had been startled by the man's words and look. It seemed that she was not to be able to aid her friends—or herself—to escape.

Yet, even in her grief and in the midst of her worry, a gleam of amusement came to her at Boldig's, "It is impossible to trust a woman." This from a traitor—a person impossible to trust!

But even Fritz had not much to say to her when he came to help peel vegetables for the men's dinner. He admitted to her that thus far Krueger had not been able to pick up any word from the submersible that had been engaged to meet

the pirates if they accomplished their part of the plot—which they had. The radio was crackling most of the day, showing that the leaders of the mutineers were getting anxious.

After she had cleared up the dinner dishes (and that was no easy work, because of her lame shoulder) Ruth went and lay down. She took the trouble to brace the bedstead against the washstand as before. Some time after she had fallen asleep she was awakened by a noise at the door. She awoke with her gaze fastened on the knob, and was sure it was being turned. But the door was locked as well as barricaded.

Before she could be positive that anybody was there who meant her harm, there was a sudden hail from the open deck. She heard several men running. Then a shout in German:

"Mr. Boldig! It is a man afloat! Man overboard!"

Ruth thought she heard somebody run from her door.

She arose and tremblingly put on her dress. Then she hastened to pull aside the bed and open her door. She felt that she was safer out upon deck. Besides, she was curious to know what the cry had meant.

CHAPTER XXIV

COUNTERPLOT

To one who had been more than forty-eight hours drifting in a scuttle-butt in mid-Atlantic, the sight of almost any kind of craft would have been welcome. Tom Cameron hailed first the plume of drifting smoke, then the mast and stacks, and then the high, camouflaged bow of the *Admiral Pekhard* with a joy that increased deliriously as he became assured that the ship was steaming head-on to his poor raft.

The steamship was moving very slowly, and it was hours before, waving his coat frantically as he stood in his bobbing craft, he knew he had been sighted by the lookout. The latter had not expected to see anything like Tom and the remains of the wrecked Zeppelin in these waters. The lookout had been straining his eyes to catch sight of a periscope.

It was providential that the course of the *Admiral Pekhard* was bringing her almost directly toward the drifting bit of wreckage. She was

almost on top of Tom before the lookout hailed and Boldig ran up to the bridge to get a better look at the object which had caused the excitement.

"That is no part of an underseas boat!" cried Boldig to the lookout. "What is it?"

"There is a man in it—see! He waves his coat. It looks like a boat—no! It is one mystery, Herr Boldig."

But the latter now had his glasses fixed on the drifting raft. He saw the broken stays, the slipper-shaped bow of the Zeppelin, and he suddenly understood. It was not the first wreck of a Zeppelin's frame work that he had seen floating in the sea; but it was the first in which he had seen a living man.

Boldig himself hailed—hailed in German. And fortunately for Tom Cameron he replied in the same language. His accent was irreproachable. Had it not been, the German officer might have thought twice about attempting to rescue the lone castaway.

The young American had no idea at first that this was a German-manned steamship—that she had been boldly taken over on the high seas by a gang of German pirates. Yet he was sharp enough to realize almost at once that there was something wrong with her.

No passengers on her decks, no officers on her

bridge until this one hailed him, and no crew along her waist watching him. Besides she was coming along at such a crippled gait.

He knew she must be a passenger ship, and the Union Jack at her masthead showed her nationality. But where was she going and why was she not convoyed?

Tom had already seen the smoke of several destroyers or converted trawlers, but had not been himself sighted by their lookouts. This was his first chance of rescue, and he was not at all particular just then who the people were aboard the *Admiral Pekhard,* as he saw she was named. With that name and under that flag she must be a British ship. As he was drifting in a part of a German Zeppelin, he naturally expected to be taken aboard as a prisoner. Yet he did or said nothing to reveal his true identity for the time being. If they wished to think him a German at first, all right; explanations could come later.

Boldig called three men to man the motor boat that trailed astern. He had to stop the ship's engines to do this, for steam could not be kept up without the small force of stokers at his command working at top speed through their entire watch. The whole crew were almost exhausted. Those whose watch it was below at this time must be allowed to sleep to recover their strength. It was a ticklish situation in more ways than one.

The *Admiral Pekhard* began to roll in the trough of the sea. As she rolled toward him Tom could better see her deck and upperworks. He marked a woman's figure come out of the after companion on the upper deck. She stood there alone and shaded her eyes with her hand as she looked off at him.

The siege Tom Cameron had been through since the Zeppelin was wrecked had racked his body a good deal, but by no means had it weakened his mind. He was sure there was something wrong with this craft. The three men were an hour in tuning up the motor-boat engine and getting that craft near enough to his raft to take Tom aboard.

The latter saw that neither of the three men was an officer. One was Fritz, and he spoke to the castaway in English. But Tom was wary. There was a flaxen-haired, big-bodied fellow who glowered at him and spoke nothing but German.

"You fell with an airship—yes?" this man asked, and Tom nodded.

The American had done secret service work behind the German lines on one occasion. There he had assumed the character of a Prussian military officer, and gradually he took on the attitude that he had used familiarly at that time. His speech and appearance bore out the claim he meant

to make if these people proved to be Germans, as he more than half suspected. How the Germans ever got control of a British ship was a mystery!

Boldig met Tom Cameron at the rail when he came up the captain's ladder. He offered a hand that the American was forced to accept.

"You have the good fortune to escape both peril by air and sea, *Mein Herr?*" said Boldig. "Your companions?"

"Are gone," Tom replied in German, shaking his head. "I am of all, the lone fortunate. 'The survival of the fit'—is it not so? We were bound for London. Because I had lived there much, I was to pilot *Herr Leutnant-Commander* over the city!"

"Ah!" said Boldig. "I thought you did not seem entirely German."

"It is the heart that counts, is it not?" Tom returned.

He knew this arrogant-looking man must be a German through and through. The British flag flying over the ship did not reassure him. He had ventured his story of being the Zeppelin pilot as a bit of camouflage. If he was mistaken—if this was an honest vessel and crew—he carried papers in his money belt that would explain who he really was.

"And you, *Mein Herr?*" Tom asked with a

gesture indicating the *Admiral Pekhard's* empty decks.

"Our story you shall learn later," said Boldig. "But rest assured. You are among friends."

He hastened to show the flaxen-haired man and Fritz how properly to pay off the line holding the motor boat in trail. The engines started again, and the ship began to pull ahead.

Tom, standing upon the after deck, gazed quietly around him. He felt that the situation was strained. There was something threatening in the pose of Boldig after all. This was no tramp steam freighter with half a crew. No, indeed! She was a well found and well furnished passenger craft. Where were the crew and passengers that should be aboard of her?

And just then he saw a white hand beckoning at the after cabin companionway. He remembered the woman he had observed from the wreck of the Zeppelin standing at that doorway. Swiftly Tom crossed the deck behind Boldig's back and reached the door which was open more than a crack.

The hand seized his own. The touch thrilled him before he heard her voice or caught a glimpse of Ruth Fielding's face.

"Tom! Tom Cameron!" she murmured. "You are saved and have been sent to me."

"Ruth!" He almost fell down the stairway

to reach her. He took her in his arms with such ardor that she could not escape. In that moment of reunion and relief she met his lips with as frank and warm a kiss as though she had really been his sister.

"Tom! Dear Tom!" she murmured.

"Great heavens, Ruth! how did you come here? What is the meaning of this business? Those Germans out there——?"

"And there are only two faithful men aboard —the first officer and the radio chief. Both locked in their rooms, Tom. We are four against eleven of these pirates!"

"Pirates!"

"No less," the girl hastened to say. "I cannot tell you all now. The others escaped in the small boats; but Mr. Dowd, Mr. Rollife, and I were left. Then the German members of the crew, and this officer, Boldig, came back and took the ship. They expect a big submarine with an extra crew to pick them up."

"What under the sun——"

"Oh!" gasped Ruth, hearing Boldig outside. "Here he comes! He has been so brutal—so disgusting! Oh, Tom!"

Her friend wheeled and leaped up the stair again. As he went he drew the automatic pistol from his bosom where he had hidden it and kept it dry. As Boldig thrust back the door Tom

pushed the muzzle of his weapon against the man's breast.

"Up with your hands!" Tom commanded. "Quick!"

Boldig fell back a pace. Tom followed him out on the open deck. He reached quickly and snatched the pistol from the German's holster with his left hand.

Then, his eye flickering to the men at the rail and seeing the flaxen-haired man trying to draw his pistol, Tom sent one bullet in that direction. The man, Guelph, sank, groaning, to the deck.

"Pick up that pistol, muzzle first, and bring it here!" commanded Tom to Fritz, and the latter obeyed quite meekly. Neither he nor the third seaman was armed. After all, Boldig did not trust his underlings.

"How shall we get your two friends out of their rooms?" Tom asked Ruth without looking around at her, for he kept his gaze upon Boldig and the others.

"That man has the keys to their staterooms."

"Come and search his pockets," said Tom. "Don't stand between me and him. Understand?" he added to Boldig. "I will shoot to kill if you try any tricks. Keep your hands up!"

Was this Tom Cameron, Ruth thought? She had never seen Tom assume such a character before. She had forgotten what army training had

done for her childhood's friend. When he had come to see her on his leaves-of-absence from the front he had seemed all boy as usual. But now!

She found the keys, and in five minutes Mr. Dowd and Mr. Rollife, armed from the right collection of weapons in the captain's room this time, joined the wonderfully arrived castaway on the open deck.

Dowd had handcuffs, too, and Boldig, Fritz, and the other unwounded seamen were quickly manacled and shut into separate rooms below.

Ruth tried to make the wounded Guelph more comfortable, although he was not seriously hurt. While she was doing this, and her three friends were searching the rest of the crew for arms and separating them so that they could do no harm, the girl chanced to glance over the rail and saw a sight that called forth a cry of rejoicing from her very heart.

There was a gray, swiftly steaming ship, a warship, bearing down upon the *Admiral Pekhard,* and the Stars and Stripes was at her masthead!

CHAPTER XXV

HOME AS FOUND

To clear up all the mysteries about their adventures—about Tom's wonderful flight in the airplane, his capture by the Zeppelin's commander, his wrecking of the Hun machine, his providential escape from the sea; as well, the trials and dangers through which Ruth had passed—to clear up all these things certainly took much time. It was not until the excitement was over that they really could talk it all out.

For at first came happenings almost as exciting as those that had already taken place. The *Seattle* had more to do than merely to take the Germans aboard as prisoners and Ruth and her friends as honored passengers, while they put a prize crew on the *Admiral Pekhard.*

For the German plot had been so far-reaching, and it had come so near being carried through to a successful finish, that the commander of the *Seattle,* of the fast cruiser type, bound home for orders, felt an attempt must be made to punish the Germans connected with the plot.

That U-boat 714 must be caught. They made the assistant wireless operator, Krueger, admit that within the hour he had caught a message from the U-boat and had sent one in reply. The submarine would arrive about nightfall, Krueger said.

The commander of the American cruiser made his plans quickly. He sent a large crew aboard the *Admiral Pekhard.* Then the cruiser steamed away to a distance. But she was a very fast ship and she did not remain far out of sight of the British steamship.

Mr. Rollife had insisted on remaining at his post. The chatter of the *Admiral Pekhard's* radio kept the American commander in touch with all that went on. When the submarine appeared on the surface, not many hundred yards away from the ship that was supposed to be in the hands of German plotters, the *Seattle* started for the spot at top-speed.

It was a great race! Tom was as excited as any sailor aboard, and until it was all over he was not content to remain with Ruth below decks.

Four of the cruiser's prize crew, masquerading as Germans, manned the motor boat and shot over to the gray side of the huge submarine. They could all speak German. They fooled the U-boat commander, *Herr Kapitan-Leutnant* Scheiner, nicely. He sent his first in command and the special crew brought from the submarine base at

Kiel to the passenger ship, crowding the small launch to the very guards.

When these men went, one by one, up the ladder, they were met behind the shelter of the rail by a number of determined American blue jackets, who disarmed them and knocked them down promptly if they ventured to offer resistance.

Before the smoke of the *Seattle* was sighted the two deck guns of the *Admiral Pekhard,* their breechlocks replaced, were trained upon the open hatch of the U-714. Through a trumpet the officer in command of the crew from the *Seattle* ordered *Kapitan-Leutnant* Scheiner to surrender his boat and crew.

When he made a dive for the open hatch, the forward gun of the British ship, manned by American gunners, put a shell right down that hatchway—and Scheiner was instantly killed.

The *Admiral Pekhard* was sent to Plymouth, as that port was nearer than Brest. Besides, the *Seattle's* commander had learned already by radio that the entire ship's company of the British ship had safely reached that port.

Mr. Dowd and Rollife went with the *Admiral Pekhard;* but after due consideration, and listening to the pleadings of Ruth Fielding and Tom Cameron, the latter pair were allowed to remain aboard the American cruiser.

"You are due to reach New York anyway, Miss

Fielding," said the commander. "And from what he tells me of his experience, I believe Captain Cameron has earned a furlough. Although I presume he will first have to be reported as being absent without leave."

All this is in the past, now. It seemed to Ruth Fielding, standing on the porch of the old farmhouse attached to the Red Mill and looking down the rutted highway, that many, many of her experiences during the months of war must have been dreams.

Even the injured shoulder troubled her no more. She was her old vigorous, cheerful self again. Yet there was a difference. There was a poise of mind and a seriousness about the girl of the Red Mill that would never again wear off. No soul that has been seared in any way by the awful flame of the Great War will ever recover from it. The scar must remain till death.

The war was well nigh over. Tom's prophecy was to be fulfilled. The Hun, driven to madness by his own sins, could fight no more. The actual fighting might end any day. On a ship coming homeward were Helen and Jennie—the latter with a tall and handsome French colonel at her side, who had been given special leave of absence from the French Intelligence Department.

Ruth saw an automobile swing into the road a

couple of miles away and grow larger and larger very rapidly as it rushed down toward her. She wound a chiffon veil about her head as she called back into the open doorway of the farmhouse kitchen:

"Tom is coming, Aunty. I sha'n't be long away."

"All right, my pretty! All right!" returned the voice of Aunt Alvirah, quite strong and cheerful again. "Oh, my back! and oh, my bones! All right!"

She hobbled to the door on her cane. Her apple-withered cheeks had a little color after all. The little old woman began to mend the moment she set eyes on "her pretty" again.

When the automobile pulled down at the gate for Ruth to step in beside the begoggled Tom and the engine was shut off, they could hear the grinding of the mill-stones. Times had improved. Uncle Jabez, as dusty and solemn of visage as ever, but with a springier step than was his wont, came to the door and waved a be-floured hand to them.

"All right, Ruthie?" asked Tom, smiling at her.

"Quite all right, Tom."

"Got the whole day free, have you?"

"Until supper time. We can take a nice, long jaunt."

"I wish it was going to continue forever—just for you and me, Ruth!" he murmured longingly, as he slipped in the clutch and the engine began to purr. "A life trip, dear!"

"Well," returned Ruth Fielding, looking at him with shining eyes, "who knows?"

THE END

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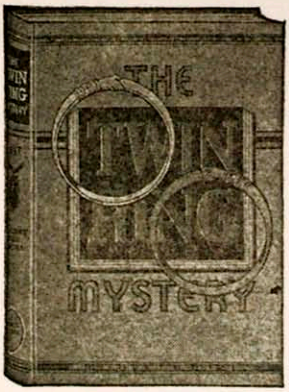

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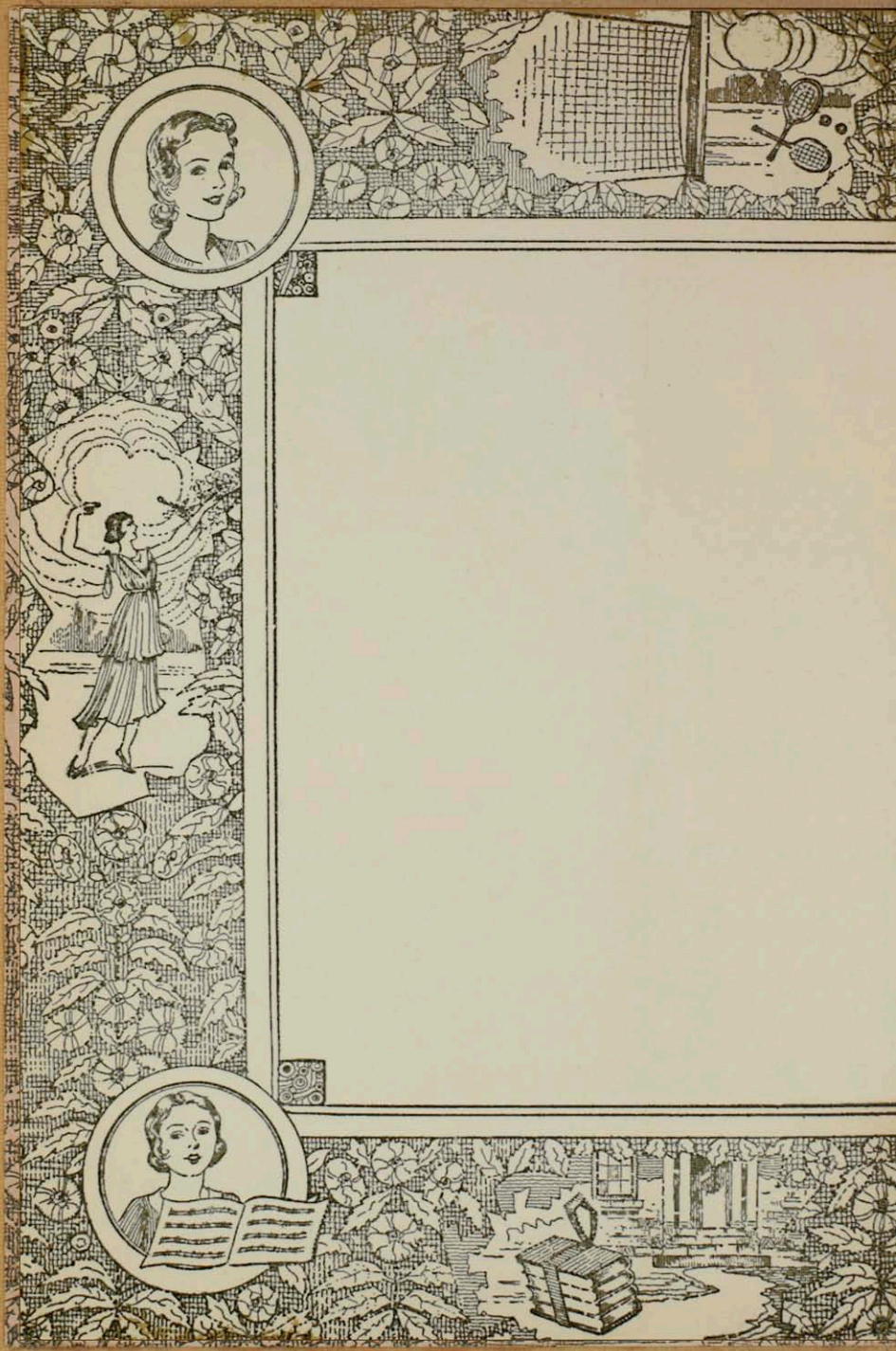
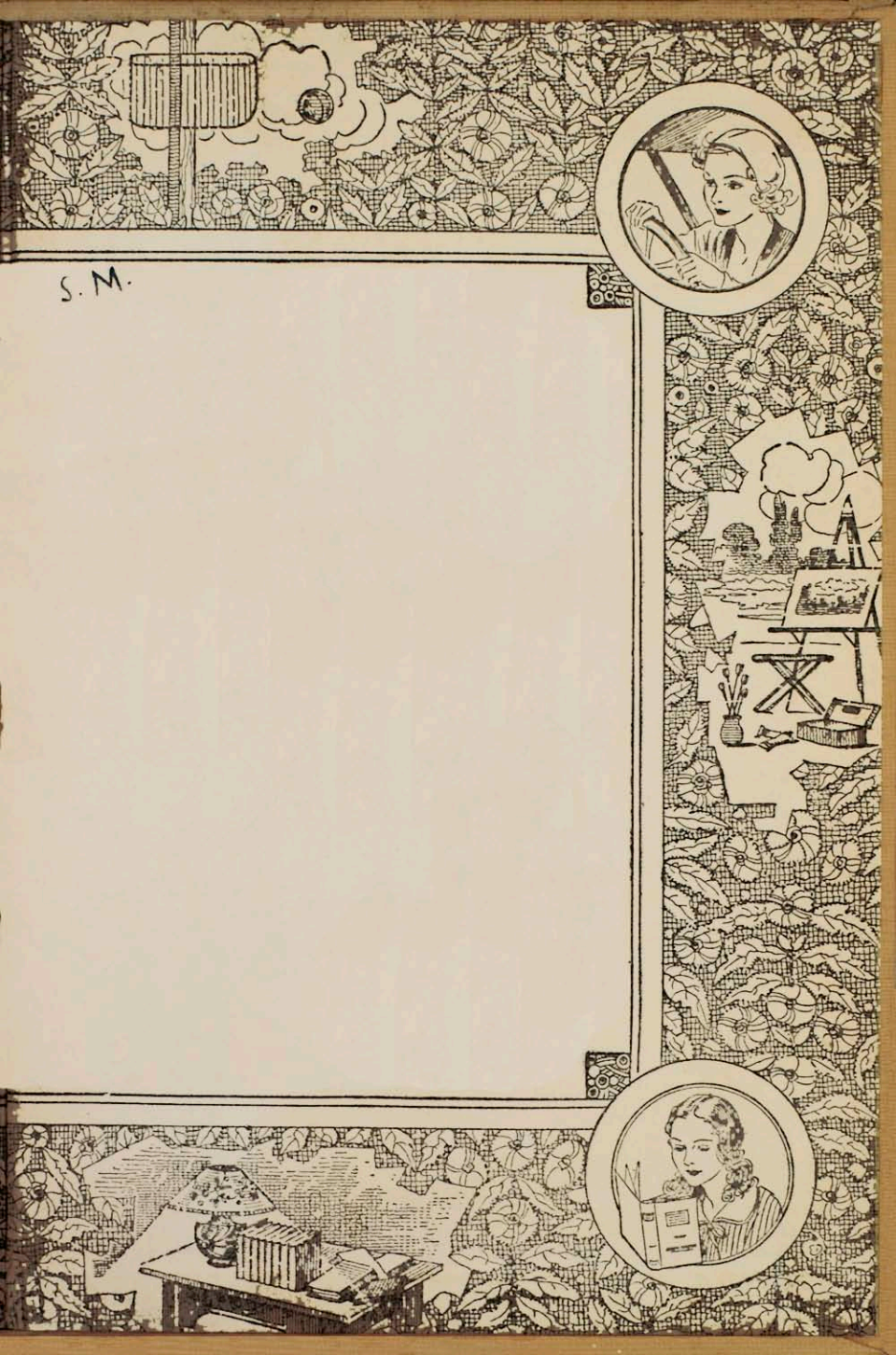
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